


# The Sword Of Damocles

Volume 1



THEODORE A. THARP



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TO

MY WIFE AND BROTHER,

*This Story*

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

DENSTON PARK, SUFFOLK,  
*Christmas, 1879.*

(RECAP)

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# THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

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## Preliminary.

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### CHAPTER I.

"GRUMPY" GRAYLE.

"I am *misanthropos*, and hate mankind."

*Shakspeare.*

"HULLOA! little carrotty wigs! where are you off to?"

The above queer salutation, delivered in a somewhat sharp manner, was familiar enough to those to whom it was addressed. The little Grayles, when out for their morning airing in Barringtreet Park, invariably encountered their great uncle, Mr. Andrew Grayle, and that gentleman as invariably gave them the same greeting—if it can be so called—half hearty, half sarcastic in its tone.

The small party, thus arrested in its constitutional ramble, would have appeared rather picturesque and interesting to any one but Mr. Grayle, who viewed it apparently with but sinister looks of disapproval. A comely, dark-eyed nursemaid was leading by the head a venerable donkey, on whose back was slung a pair of basket-panniers; seated in these, on either side, were a

little girl and boy, aged respectively five and six—two pretty children, with laughing blue eyes and rich auburn hair of a decided tint, which earned from their cynical relative the epithet “carrotty.” These formed a very interesting trio, I had almost said quartette, but of course old “Ned,” the donkey, though an ancient retainer in the family, could hardly be bracketed with his biped companions. Yet, in Mr. Grayle’s eyes, the trio appeared to find the least favour; Ned, it would seem, obtaining his first consideration.

“Well, nurse, and how’s the dicky this morning?” he inquired abruptly, giving a by no means gentle tug at one of the animal’s ears.

“Very well, sir, thank you,” answered Eliza, with a smirk, as if taking the inquiry to herself, and ready for a flirtation even with such an unpromising individual as “Grumpy” Grayle; for such, owing to his morose disposition, was the universal nickname of this eccentric man.

“Umph! and you, you red-headed little brats?” he added, with a grunt, and poking at the children with a spudded stick he carried in his hand.

“Twite well, thank you, Uncle Andy,” replied they in chorus.

“Then off you go again!” exclaimed the playful Mr. Grumpy, administering to poor Ned a vicious whack over the quarters with his stick, which that respectable donkey indignantly resented by a kick that nearly sent little Hector and Agnes flying out of the panniers, eliciting hearty laughter from the children and a frightened scream from the nurse. Turning with a saucy rebuke on her tongue, Eliza saw Mr. Grayle hobbling away out of earshot, as fast as his gouty feet would carry him. Meanwhile the donkey, roused out of its accustomed lethargy,

trotted off in an opposite direction, and threatened to jog its two precious burdens into one unrecognizable jelly before the nurse could stop him.

"Wretched little devils!" growled Grumpy, as he looked after them disappearing across the park; "how could *they* ever grow up or come to any good with such a grandfather to look after 'em. Bah!" and viciously digging up a thistle or two with his spud, he went on his way mumbling and ruminating to himself in his usual misanthropic fashion.

Andrew Grayle had well earned his *sobriquet* of Grumpy; he was, as he himself was wont to express it, a man who had been "soured from his birth up," or, as he might have explained further, a man who had been soured *at* his birth; but thereon hangs the key to his idiosyncrasy, to obtain which we must go back some fifty odd years.

The night of the 10th of May, 179—, was one of considerable excitement and bustle in the old Hall at Barringtrees; but Squire Grayle, Grumpy's father, appeared to be the least disturbed member of his household, and awaited in his sanctum with comparative composure the issue of a certain great event which was pending. Regarding that issue he was not kept long in suspense; and having been married eight years without an heir to the family estates—three daughters having come into the world one after another with provoking monotony—it may be imagined he was well satisfied with the sequel.

"I congratulate you, my dear sir; I congratulate you with all my heart," exclaimed the doctor, as he entered the study, complacently washing his hands with invisible materials; "two fine little babies as ever you saw."

"Babies?" quoth the Squire, in astonishment.

"Ay, babies, my dear sir—twins!" returned the

physician, with a merry twinkle in his eye, adding emphatically, "and both boys!"

"Bless my soul! you don't say so. And which is the elder?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the doctor, in reply; "*we've* sorted them, my dear sir, with due regard to primogeniture."

Thus it was that Andrew Grayle just missed inheriting the splendid Barringtrees estates by one hour and five minutes! As a child he was always of an odd disposition, but not till he reached a discriminating age did he realize the narrow escape he had had of being heir to one of the finest properties in the south-east of England; and until later, when the elder twin actually inherited, at the death of their father, he merely cherished a latent feeling of jealousy towards his more fortunate brother.

Percy Grayle had ever looked upon Andrew as "a queer sort of fellow with a tile off," and on that account had tolerated his disagreeable character with good-humoured leniency. But he little knew how the "queer sort of fellow's" unhealthy broodings were gradually ripening into downright hatred, nor how bitterly Andrew cursed his bad luck in having come into the world just an hour and five minutes too late.

The position was undoubtedly a tantalizing one; but had Grumpy been anything of a philosopher, he might have consoled himself with the reflection that the silver spoon does not always bring syrup to the lips, and often, indeed, only stirs up the bitter cup to overflowing. His ill-regulated mind, however, would only allow him to regard the situation with feelings of morbid discontent, and his brother with suppressed rancour, as though the latter were responsible for his seniority.

But soon after the Squire's death, which occurred when



the twins were about eight-and-twenty, a certain circumstance tended to mollify Andrew's implacability, and caused him to repress, for the time, all outward show of enmity.

Percy Grayle, being in the Guards, and devoted to his profession, was not disposed to relinquish it at present, even in favour of a squirehood ; so, instead of taking up his proper position in the county, and living on his estate, he preferred to give up, as a temporary measure, the management of the latter to Andrew. This was, no doubt, an injudicious step, which he had some cause afterwards to regret ; but the arrangement was highly approved of by Grumpy, who took every advantage of it, and soon set about managing the property with a vengeance. His reign, however, did not last very long ; for what with cutting down some of the finest trees in the park, which he called “thinning the timber;” slaughtering most of the bucks, and not a few does, which he called “thinning the deer;” killing down nearly every head of game on the place, which he called “thinning the preserves;” turning out tenants, pulling down cottages, and indulging in such a general process of thinning altogether, it became evident that the property would soon be in a somewhat attenuated condition if this was not put a stop to, so that the elder brother felt bound to take possession with as little delay as possible—and having promised Andrew that he would not do so while an officer and a bachelor, sold out and married in self-defence.

It is needless to say that Grumpy Grayle's nose was very much put out of joint by this; nevertheless, he yielded up the reins of government with tolerable grace—though he certainly could not render a good account of his stewardship—and retired to live in a little cottage he had built for himself, with his brother's permission, just without the precincts of the park.



In due course of time Mrs. Grayle presented her husband with a son and heir, which little event effectually demolished the last faint hope Grumpy entertained of ever succeeding to the estates; and though it was fated that George, the heir, should be the only child, he speedily put further obstacles in the way of his uncle's wildest aspirations by following in the footsteps of his father, and marrying at an early age. The issue of that marriage was a son and daughter—Hector and Agnes—the little children who were introduced in the donkey panniers at the opening page.

## CHAPTER II.

## SMOULDERING FIRES.

“Sour discontent, that quarrels with our fate,  
 May give fresh smart, but not the old abate;  
 The uneasy passion’s disingenuous wit,  
 The ill reveals, but hides the benefit.”

*Sir R. Blackmore.*

GRUMPY Grayle’s unnatural antipathy to his brother, though temporarily quelled during his brief career of manager, revived with twofold bitterness shortly after the Squire took up his proper position at Barringtrees; and he became so outrageously objectionable altogether, that an open breach soon took place between them. He domineered over the bailiff, gamekeepers, and other retainers on the estate, to a degree that caused frequent complaints to be made to their master. He pragmatically contradicted his brother’s orders, often substituting directions of his own, and disapproved of every step taken by the Squire in the interests of the property, abusing him besides surreptitiously to all the tenants and farmers around who would listen to him. In short, having once held authority, he had no notion of relinquishing it in a hurry, and he made himself such a monstrous nuisance that Percy Grayle, who for a time was very forbearing, lost all patience at last, and forbade him not only to intrude himself at the Hall, but even to enter the park-

gates. Sorry he was that he could not forbid him the estate as well ; but having, in a weak moment, given him two or three acres to build upon, which Grumpy had availed himself of in the erection of "Crutch Hut," as he called his cottage, the Squire felt that he could not very well eject him, even with legal measures ; nor, for the matter of that, could he keep him out of the park, without directing violence to be used, for Grumpy persisted in trespassing in spite of orders, and his brother was fain to submit to it to avoid disgraceful *esclandre*.

War to the knife being thus declared, the worst traits in Andrew's character were aroused ; and, brooding grimly over his fancied grievances, he longed to wreak a summary vengeance on his brother.

When George was born the rejoicings at Barringtrees were universal (except in the case of our amiable friend) ; for not only were Percy and his wife delighted at having a son and heir, but the tenants themselves augured well from the event, since—the Squire not being of a very strong constitution—it removed any remote chance that might arise of Grumpy Grayle ever becoming their landlord.

The news spread from cottage to cottage like wildfire ; the church bells rang out, and many a pewter pot was emptied to the health of the infant heir. Years rolled on, and George Grayle grew from long clothes to jackets, passing in due course from the school-room to Eton, and from Eton to Cambridge. No brothers nor sisters having followed his birth, the lad found his childhood dull and gloomy in the ancestral hall, and scarcely looked forward with pleasure to the holidays, when he would lose the companionship of his school-mates. He only rendered his home tolerable by associating with the grooms, stable-boys, and such like about the place, much to his father's

disgust, who was shocked to see him display such low tastes.

Foolish man ! he failed to observe that the fault lay at his own door, in making no effort to provide his son with companions of the same age and station.

There are many cases like George Grayle's, where a lad, without brothers or sisters, is left to his own resources for amusement—to seek where he may those youthful associates so essential to childhood, and which, if thoughtlessly denied him, leave the boy but a poor and stupid creature at best. *Les premiers jours du printemps ont moins de grâce que la vertu naissante d'un jeune homme*, and it is during the spring-time of a boy's life that the budding character, as yet unformed, should be carefully watched and cultivated, or it will yield no good fruit.

Notwithstanding his father's disapproval, no stringent measures were taken to prevent George Grayle from choosing the companions alluded to, and sure enough perpetual intimacy with them operated on the boy's disposition hereafter. He laboured, moreover, under another disadvantage in inheriting his mother's qualities rather than his father's ; for the Squire had married in haste, and was now repenting at leisure ; Mrs. Grayle, as will be subsequently seen, being a woman of no very elevated tastes nor amiable character. She was, indeed, a lady with an antagonistic turn of mind ; and besides quarrelling perpetually with her husband and others, helped to sow dissension between father and son, and did more than her share, besides, in perpetuating the feud between the Squire and his brother.

In addition to the above drawbacks, there was a more serious one still to the healthy development of George's mind, caused by the close friendship which he had formed with his eccentric uncle. That old reprobate had won

his nephew's heart by various little acts of kindness, and George used to look forward with pleasure to their clandestine meetings in the park—clandestine, since Percy had forbidden his son to hold any intercourse whatever with Grumpy. Strict obedience, however, was never sufficiently enforced; and the Squire, though fond of the boy, was of too phlegmatic a character to take much trouble in looking after him—so the mandate was disregarded. As George grew older, he took a great delight in his visits to Crutch Hut and its wonderful museum (his uncle had a mania for collecting curiosities), and the intimacy increased day by day, artfully encouraged by Grumpy, who at length succeeded in alienating the lad from his father so far as to make him look upon his parent in the light of a cruel tyrant, and his uncle as an oppressed martyr. This little *souçon* of revenge was very sweet to the martyr himself, but by no means sufficient to satisfy him, and he contemplated further and deeper mischief in his wicked old brain.

George was about eighteen when he went to Cambridge, where he remained for two or three terms without distinguishing himself, except by riotous living—and in that he certainly excelled—running up big bills in all directions, and leading such a dissolute life altogether as ended at length in his being sent down for good. This was a great sorrow to his father, who began to despair of him already as an incorrigible ne'er-do-weel; while the venomous-minded Andrew rejoiced in secret at the son and heir's disgrace.

A year or two after this, it happened that Sir Francis and Lady Mountjoy, of Merrydale Hall, in the neighbourhood, proposed to get up some private theatricals at their house, and George, being accounted a capital amateur, was asked to take a part. He had, in fact, devoted more



time to Lacy's acting editions than classic lore or modern sciences when at Cambridge, and had fairly earned there a histrionic reputation, if he took no higher honours.

Now it chanced that in these theatricals at Merrydale Hall, George was cast to play the lover to a Miss Gertrude Tewkesley—a fair and beautiful girl of good birth though no fortune; and, as often happens in private theatricals, this led to a little romance between them on their own account, when Gertrude fell in love with George in real earnest, in return for the stage devotion he had bestowed upon her. An engagement followed, which was approved by their respective parents; for though Mr. Tewkesley, albeit of good family, was only a clergyman with a small living in a neighbouring county, and could give no dowry to his daughter, Percy Grayle hoped that his son's alliance with a young lady of gentle birth would serve both to refine and reform his character. *Vilius argentum est auro, virtutibus aurum*, was an argument he would not dispute with Horace; and knowing Gertrude to be a girl of high principles and good moral training, he did not doubt she would make an excellent wife, so was content to accept virtue in lieu of a marriage settlement.

The wedding was fixed, and after their honeymoon, George and his wife took up their abode permanently at the Hall. Most fatal of all fatal mistakes; but since it was his father's wish, and George was utterly dependent on him for an income, they had no alternative. In such a house of discord, with such a husband and such a mother-in-law, poor Gertrude's chance of happiness seemed remote indeed. And so it proved; but the Squire was too obstinate or too selfish at first to see the error he had committed in obliging them to live under the paternal roof—selfish, since he had conceived a strong affection for his daughter-in-law, and desired some con-

genial spirit in the house as a set-off to his uncongenial wife and unfilial son.

Nearly fourteen months passed, though not too smoothly for the younger Mrs. Grayle, and on New Year's Day Hector was born. On this occasion, as was customary at Barringtrees, the gloomy old Hall consented to shake off its dismal blues for the nonce, and bell-ringing and beer-drinking in the village, and high jinks and festivities in the servants' hall, became the order of the day. But only for the day—the grey old mansion seemed quite ashamed of its jollity next morning, and appeared to shroud itself in a darker cloak of gloom than ever.

## CHAPTER III.

## A FLARE UP.

"How irksome is this music to my heart !  
When such strings jar, what hope of harmony?"

*Shakspeare.*

THE birth of a son was indeed a solace to Gertrude in her young married life, which, it is needless to say, was far from a happy one. George, still under the secret influence of his uncle, seemed in no way improved by his marriage, and did his utmost, by many acts of unkindness and neglect, to throw to the four winds that inestimable treasure, the love of a good wife. And Gertrude, with little Hector at her bosom, for a time actually allowed the strong current of her great love to take a new channel, though she remained as loyal as ever at heart to her unworthy spouse. Of course the Squire noticed this unhappy state of things, and was pained beyond measure to see such an affection as Gertrude's trodden underfoot by an unappreciative husband—crushed out of her, as it were, by cold neglect and indifference.

For a long time he abstained from remonstrating with his son, thinking it unadvisable to interfere between man and wife; but as matters became worse, he was resolved at length to speak out.

One morning George found himself *tête-à-tête* with his father at breakfast, the ladies having failed, at present,

to put in an appearance. The meal passed off in ominous silence, for father and son had long since ceased to find pleasure in each other's company; and George, feeling a presentiment that the Squire was preparing for an attack, thought to shirk it by beating a retreat; so, hastily gulping down his tea, he rose abruptly from the table.

"George," cried his father, calling him back as he reached the door, "I desire to speak with you for a few minutes on—on an important subject."

"Certainly, sir," replied George, with a forced air of insolence; though this failed to cover the sheepishness with which he complied.

"If you can spare me so much of your valuable time," added his parent, a little sarcastically.

"I'm not aware that I value my time very highly. It hangs heavy enough on my hands, goodness knows."

"Sit down again, then."

George did so.

"I think," resumed the Squire, after a short pause, "I had better divide what I have to say under three heads."

"Why not give it us all in a lump, sir?—save a lot of trouble."

"George!" pompously exclaimed Mr. Grayle, "this is no matter to be treated lightly. I don't often interfere with you, you'll allow; but on this occasion I not only demand your attention, sir, but your respect." This was said in a tone that put a stop to further flippancy for the moment. "As I observed, I will divide my subject into three parts—matters have gone quite long enough without my interference. Firstly, with regard to your wife—the sweetest and most amiable woman that ever breathed—"

"I don't want to be told all that," interrupted George, sulkily.

"But you *shall* be told of it," cried his father, waxing angry, as he thought of the neglected Gertrude; "you don't appear to realize the fact yourself, so you must be reminded of it."

"Very well, father; grant her all the virtues."

"Which she has, sir; and how do you value such a treasure? I say what return do you make her for all the love and devotion she squanders on you? None but cruel coldness and contempt, simply because she has no money to give you—though you knew that well enough when you married her. But worse than this; I could forgive you the mere coldness, were your treatment sometimes not both harsh and brutal."

"How, father?"

"I've heard you use language to her that I wouldn't use to a dog—"

"Well, and I've heard *you* come it pretty strong, too, when you've been riled with the mater," retorted the dutiful son; "and, after all, I only let out a bit when Gertrude riles *me*. Come, come, sir, what's the use of these mutual recriminations? I let you and your wife alone—you let me and mine."

"Preposterous! 'pon my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Grayle, rising and pacing the room angrily. "Now I'll tell you what it is, George; unless you change your tactics altogether, and at once, we can't live under the same roof any longer, that's all about it."

"Very well, sir, as you please. But to drop the wife subject, as the first head, what's the second? Let's have the second head."

"I have not yet done with the first, but we'll dismiss it for the present," said the Squire, reseating himself, and taking up from the breakfast-table two or three ugly-looking letters, which had arrived that morning. "The



next subject I wish to speak about is with regard to all these bills—these unpardonably extravagant items that I find here, and which you direct to be sent to me.

"Really, my dear father, I can't argue these matters," remarked George coolly, at the same time pounding and smashing away at an eggshell to ease his irritation; "they're all necessities."

"Necessaries be d——d, sir!"

"Exactly so—then suppose we get on to the third head of your discourse. I'm anxious to hear the third head."

"No doubt you are. In my opinion the third head is responsible for the other two."

"Now you're getting beyond me, sir; I don't quite understand."

"I will soon explain myself. I refer to your uncle. Of course I'm aware that for a long time past you have kept up constant and intimate communication with him, although you knew it was strictly against my wishes—in fact, my commands; yet you have wilfully disobeyed me, and carried on a deception unworthy of a gentleman and my son."

"Not at all; I left you to find out by degrees—"

"That you preferred your uncle to your father—excellent! but I tell you once again I forbid you to have anything to do with my brother; his influence over you is obvious enough as it is."

"Really I don't see why I should be at loggerheads with poor uncle Andrew, merely because you are. He's a jolly old fellow, and very kind to me; besides, my dear father, you must excuse me, I never make other people's quarrels my own."

Here a dangerous pause ensued, during which he eyed his father, half anxiously, half defiantly.

"George!" exclaimed the Squire at last, turning very pale, and starting up again from his chair, "do you mean this?"

"I do," observed George, carelessly.

"Then, by heaven! I wash my hands of you. Do you hear me? I wash my hands of you entirely."

"I hear you, sir."

"Go to your uncle, you ungrateful dog! Let him take care of you for the future; I won't."

"Very well, sir," said George, also rising.

"You'll reap your reward for this, I can tell you," continued Mr. Grayle, in excited tones. "Your undutiful ingratitude, your disobedience and base conduct to me as your father, and your brutality to your wife, will bring you to utter and irretrievable ruin, and serve you right—to the gallows, I shouldn't wonder."

"Very likely," remarked the son, imperturbably, "though you may hear I've cheated *them*."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"By blowing out my brains, perhaps."

"Indeed!" returned his parent, with cutting sarcasm, "then I hope you'll make a good shot, for they're a precious small target."

"That I can't help," retorted George, adding, *sotto voce*, "I suppose I inherit them;" here he moved towards the door, turning back as he reached it, and saying, "You'll be sorry for this, I believe, by-and-by, father; but I shall take you at your word. I'm quite unhappy enough to go to the devil my own way, and I will. Good-bye, sir," he continued, holding out his hand. "Oh, very well, if you won't, then—" for the Squire had turned to the window, and was whistling a popular polka, very much out of tune.

In Mr. Grayle's inmost heart he was half regretting

his impulsiveness, but was far too proud to recall the scapegrace; on the other hand, the son was equally proud, and would sooner have died than have given in. He hesitated for an instant; and then the door closed, separating the two, and fixing a wider gulf between them than at the time they anticipated, or even dreamt of.

Half angry with himself, and indignant at the unnatural conduct of his father, as he considered it, George snatched up his hat and hurried from the Hall, determined to do something desperate, he scarce knew what; meantime he found himself instinctively making his way to Crutch Hut, to consult that very doubtful oracle, his uncle.

"Hulloa, boy!" cried the oracle, as George made his appearance, in an excited state, "what's the matter now? Another shindy at the Hall, eh? jolly house to live in, that."

"It is, and no mistake," replied George, throwing himself into an armchair opposite. "It *is* a jolly house to live in, uncle; so jolly that I mean to cut the whole concern."

"Ah!" exclaimed Grumpy, becoming interested; "and how are you going to do that?"

"Oh, anyhow—hire a crossing—hook it to sea—enlist, or something; I don't care what."

"But, bless my soul!" quoth the uncle, throwing up his hands in feigned astonishment; "I thought you were such a happy married man, with a brand-new baby and all the rest of it."

"None of your chaff, Uncle Andrew; you know I hate the whole business. Gertrude's a good girl enough, I daresay—too good for a fellow like me, p'r'aps; but what with my mother's meddling, and now the guv'nor's, and being without money and all that, we're always having

rows. And then they take her part, and—oh, well, never mind, I won't bother you about it all. I'm a miserable dog, and I mean to have done with it."

"I don't wonder, I'm sure," observed his worthy relative, egging him on; "young blood won't stand being sat upon, will it? I admire your spirit. And so," he added, after a short pause, watching him with a wicked twinkle in his little black eyes, "you're really going to make a bolt of it?"

"I am. I must now—the gov'nor as good as told me this morning to go to the devil, and so I came to you—I mean—"

"Never mind, pray don't mention it," exclaimed Grumpy, laughing good-humouredly at the *faux pas*; "the devil's never so black as he's painted, and I've no doubt your father has painted *me* black enough."

"That he has," cried George, "and it's chiefly through my being so chummy with you that we had the row."

"Ah, indeed! exactly; charming fellow my brother! And so you look to *me* for protection, eh?"

"That's what the gov'nor told me to do—but I don't wish to bother anybody; all I want is a start."

"And you shall have it, my boy," said Andrew Grayle, with good-natured emphasis, adding to himself, "the sooner we get him out of the way the better;" then aloud, "and what would you call a start? a fiver? a tenner? two tenners? come—" and the generous uncle immediately hobbled across to his *escritoire*.

"Um, I can't do much with twenty pounds, uncle," remarked George, dubiously.

"Not much!" cried Grumpy, in a falsetto key (a voice he always adopted when surprised or excited), and turning up his eyebrows with an astonished look; "not much! why, think of the heaps of young men who have gone up



to town with half-a-crown, and turned out Lord Mayors afterwards. Think of the young chap who left his home in a pair of patched breeches, and came back a millionaire rolling in riches—there! there's a bit of my own poetry for you, and a couple of beautiful new tenners to boot," handing them to him.

"Put another to these, Uncle Andrew," pleaded his nephew, examining the clean crisp notes, "and I'm off."

"Another fiver, then, for it's all I've got," rejoined his uncle, snatching it out and locking up the *secrétaire* with a bang, as if afraid of George giving him the lie by examining the interior. "And now, boy," continued he, dropping his keys into his pocket, and hobbling back, "what are you going to do, eh?"

"Oh, I shall just run up to town and try my luck there, or go abroad—"

"Better go abroad at once. London has been done to death with fortune-hunters."

"Well, I shall see; at any-rate I'll write and tell you my plans—only keep them to yourself."

"Of course, of course."

"And I say, uncle, I wish you'd just break it to Gertrude—say good-bye for me, and all that sort of thing."

"Not if I know it, my boy, thank you," replied Grumpy, promptly; "she'd blame me as sure as eggs, and I don't fancy a scene with an injured female."

"Very well, then; I shall have to write it, for I haven't the face to meet her myself. But, after all, she's much better without me, and she's got the guv'nor, and the mother, and the baby, and another coming"—(Uncle Andrew pricked up his ears anxiously), "so she won't take any harm. I don't mean to see any of them before I go. I shall just square old Stephens, and get him to



put me some things together, and then 'away,' as they say in the play."

"Well, good luck to you, my boy!" exclaimed Grumpy, slapping him on the back in a hearty manner; and after a little further discussion, and some advice *gratis*, George took leave of his worthy uncle, and before the day was out had put many miles between himself and Barringtree.

Naturally there was a scene at the Hall when Gertrude and Mrs. Grayle learnt from the Squire under what circumstances George had disappeared. But Mr. Grayle consoled Gertrude with the assurance that her worthless husband would return soon enough when he had had a dose of shifting for himself, and hoped that, when he did come back, he might do so a wiser and a better man.

It is unnecessary to follow up at present the career of the prodigal heir-apparent, beyond remarking that the twenty-five pounds given him by his uncle, and a few sovereigns of his own, were very soon spent in London, and twice he wrote to Grumpy Grayle for money. The first time his uncle sent him another five-pound note, accompanied by a letter abusing all the Hall people in the most outrageous terms, and poisoning George's mind against them still further, ultimately urging him at once to work his passage across to New York or Melbourne, where he was certain to find a fortune awaiting him. The second time he forwarded him a post-office order for a guinea, and, rather tired of these importunities, wound up another vituperative letter in the following characteristic way:—

"I can't do more than the enclosed, my dear boy; recollect that I'm only a younger son, with a wretchedly

small portion " (here Uncle Andrew's brow contracted at the thought as he wrote); "so you must really shift for yourself, or get my amiable brother to help you, as is his duty. You know you can't bleed a post, and I'm very like a post at present; and the servant tells me there's another waiting outside; so no more, in haste, from

"Yours impecuniously,

"UNCLE ANDREW."

To this letter he received no reply, nor did he ever hear from his grateful nephew again.

"Ah!" often soliloquized Grumpy, "bad lot, very; just like his father. A good riddance anyhow, and I don't expect we shall see much more of *him*. He's pretty sure to commit suicide if he stays in London; he's very likely to get drowned if he goes to sea, shot if he goes as a soldier, or scalped if he goes as a trapper; and he'll probably drink himself to death whatever he goes as; so we're certain to get rid of him somehow." And, summing up in this convenient fashion, Andrew Grayle once more took a peep into the future of the Barringtrees property.

"Umph! my sweet brother has about as much constitution as a cockchafer; lungs weak, heart weak, blood at a standstill; while I'm as robust as a bull, with a circulation as brisk as a whirlpool, and brisker. Then there's that puling, hectic-looking baby—he can't live; and damme!" he almost shouted, slapping his short, thick thigh, "old Grumpy, as they call me, will be master here yet! By the way, though, George said something about another coming. Well, well, if there is, let's hope it will be a daughter; we shall see."

• And they did see; and this time the church bells did

not ring, though Grumpy Grayle very nearly ordered them to do so on his own account, and out of the joyousness of his heart, for it *was* a daughter. So the monomaniac breathed again.

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## The Story.



### CHAPTER IV.

#### "THE FINEST ESTATE IN ENGLAND."

"Property communicates a charm to whatever is the object of it. . . . It endears to the child its plaything, to the peasant his cottage, to the landholder his estate."—*Paley*.

To depart from these snatchy periods, and come to my story proper, I must ask the reader to take a long jump with me—a skip of fifteen years; that is, fifteen years from the first incident introduced in Chapter I., where Grumpy Grayle met the donkey party in the park.

It was a glorious morning towards the end of October—such a morning as makes the heart of man joyous, and raises one's spirits to an undignified degree of hilarity—when Hector Grayle, now developing into a fine young man, in spite of his uncle's prophecy, emerged from the stableyard of Barringtrees Hall, with a gun on his shoulder and a couple of retrievers bounding round him with delight, one of the under-keepers following in the rear.

"Steady, boys! heel, Pilot!" called their master, as the exuberance of the dogs' spirits ran away with them towards some tempting-looking coverts while crossing the park.

"I wonder where that fellow Clem can have got to," Hector muttered to himself; "most unpunctual beggar; and I hate waiting on a day like this. Perhaps I shall find him at the Lodge."

And away he hurried in the direction of the entrance gates on the further side of the park, whistling merrily as he went.

On reaching the High Lodge—so called from its situation on a slight eminence, and in contradistinction from the Low Lodge on the opposite side—Hector knocked at the door, which was opened by the keeper's wife.

"Good morning, Mrs. Rolfe," said he; "I just called to ask if Mr. Mountjoy had passed through here?"

"No, sir," replied the woman; "we haven't opened the gates yet to any one to-day."

"Well, he is sure to come this way from Merrydale; so I'd better wait for him," observed Hector, adding to the underkeeper, "Phillips, tell the beaters to meet us here."

"Won't you please to step in, sir," said Mrs. Rolfe, opening the door wider, "and sit down for a bit?"

Complying with the invitation, the young man disappeared into the cottage, and while he waits for his friend, let us take a brief glimpse of the park and distant Hall; especially as the best view is to be obtained here from the upper gates, and the day is simply perfection for showing it off to advantage.

In point of size Barringtrees Park could scarcely compare with many nobler country-seats in England, having



an area of something less than a thousand acres ; but with its splendid timber, well-kept woods, undulating surface, and ornamental water, it made up in quality what it lacked in quantity. Such was the arrangement of the trees and plantations, aided by art as well as nature, that, taken almost from any point of view, the park itself looked larger than it actually was, and the numberless vistas, so skilfully planned, gave evidence of the artistic care bestowed on their planting. Certainly Grumpy Grayle's depredations during his short but mischievous reign had left an ugly gap here and there ; but as this was several years ago, the hand of time had, in a measure, counter-acted the hand of the spoiler.

One of the most prominent features in the park, and which had stood for generations, was the splendid avenue of limes leading from the upper entrance-gates to the Hall, some three-quarters of a mile in length, enclosing a carriage-drive, on each side of which was a broad grass ride, designated by Hector and Agnes as the "straight run in," and which was the scene of many a race home between their rival ponies. At this time of year the avenue was especially an ornament, and the rich autumnal tints added immensely to the dignity and beauty of the old lime-trees ; in every part of the park, as far as the eye could reach, a heterogeneous mass of colour presented itself in exquisite confusion, lent by the fading glory of the moribund foliage on wood and "spinney." On the left-hand side of the avenue, as you looked towards the Hall from the High Lodge, was a handsome piece of water stretching up to the grounds of the mansion, the lawn sloping down to meet it. Near this point stood a picturesque boat-house, canopied by a fine old weeping willow, which seemed to lean over it with maternal affection.

Various water-birds of all climes and colours fraternized on the lake, and, keeping aloof from this mixed society, sailed a few majestic swans, which appeared to resent the presence of these interlopers on their watery domain, for until lately they had enjoyed the monopoly of it.

On the further side of the lake from the Hall, two or three little creeks, fringed by overhanging shrubbery, intercepted the regularity of its bank; the dark evergreens, reflected in the limpid water, bending over this perpetual looking-glass, and nodding to themselves, as if with gratified vanity, when stirred by the breeze. A walk of some length wound its way along this bank, shaded by a thick wood which skirted the lake for a considerable distance; other paths branched out into the depths of the covert; the main walk being connected with the grounds of the Hall by an ornamental bridge that stretched across the water at a conveniently narrow point.

Amongst other beauties, the lake could boast one or two little wooded islands, lying at some distance from each other; and though these were artificial, they were none the less picturesque, and afforded an excellent place of refuge for the wild fowl during the breeding season.

The Hall itself hardly did justice to the beauties with which it was surrounded, being a gloomy-looking, square-shaped edifice, rather of the barrack type of architecture peculiar to the Georgian era. The old Elizabethan mansion, which was reported to have been very handsome and worthy of any estate, had been nearly all burnt down a century and a half ago, and little was left of its beauty save tradition. The exterior of the old part that remained had quite lost its original character, having been pulled about from time to time to make it uniform with the new,

and the present house had few characteristics worthy of mention beyond innumerable windows and chimney-stacks. One redeeming point, however, existed in a handsome, Doric-pillared portico, which had been erected within the last eighty years by Hector's great-grandfather, but it must be owned that this portico appeared a little out of place ; howbeit, since it relieved the monotony of the rest of the structure, even the most hypercritical might have accepted it *en masse* as an improvement.

But if the Manor-house gives little scope for description, the grounds in which it stands amply compensate for any deficiency ; and it would have gladdened the heart of a landscape gardener to have viewed the taste and judgment evinced in the laying out of the flower-beds, ferneries, lawns, shrubberies, and conservatories ; which, however, must be left to the imagination, since it would occupy too much space to describe the whole in detail. A cordon, in the shape of a lofty iron fence, surmounted with festooned chains, ran round these grounds, separating them from the park, and preventing the intrusion of the too active fallow-deer, since the marvellous agility of these graceful creatures needed a formidable barrier to keep them at bay. A large herd of them had for generations been kept at Barringtrees, and becoming tame in their nature, made that part of the park, close under this fence, their favourite browsing-ground. The old bucks, as watched from the Hall windows, might often be seen tossing their stately heads with wistful looks thrown towards the choice shrubs and plants within the enclosure, as though they longed to make a raid upon the sacred precincts of the garden.

For the rest, the property of Barringtrees, always quoted by Grumpy Grayle, though hyperbolically of course, as "the finest estate in England," may be briefly described

as extending over an area of fifteen thousand acres of good productive soil—yielding from nine to ten coomb an acre—splendidly farmed, with plenty of woods for preserving game, and large open fields—forming a healthy contrast to these wretchedly cramped plots of land in some parts of the country, which look like Lilliputian attempts at agriculture.

“ Here he is at last ! ” exclaimed Hector, who, after waiting nearly half an hour in the keeper’s lodge, heard at length the sound of wheels approaching. Not that he was much to be pitied for the delay, seeing how pleasantly he had passed the time, cosily seated by a log-fire, and enjoying the *tête-à-tête* society of one of the prettiest girls to be found in any part of the county.

Mrs. Rolfe, an ever-busy housewife, had betaken herself to the back premises soon after Hector’s arrival, and thus left him to be entertained by her daughter alone.

Now Lizzie Rolfe was without doubt a beauty of no ordinary type ; and Hector thought, as he scanned her lovely face with respectful admiration, that old Gideon Rolfe and his wife might well be proud of their only child.

Perfectly unaffected in her manner, and withal never forgetting the difference in their stations, Lizzie chatted away to him with a natural ease that well became her. She was just on the verge of womanhood—not yet having attained her nineteenth year—and her figure, of medium height, clad in a close-fitting, home-spun dress, was the perfection of grace and symmetry. It is impossible to give a correct impression of such a face as Lizzie Rolfe’s by a mere pen-and-ink description ; she must be seen to be appreciated, as the showman would say of his show ;



but since that is out of the question, it falls to my province to endeavour to paint her portrait, however feebly. Imagine, then, a delicately-formed oval face, with very dark brown hair rippling in natural waves over a rather low forehead, and neatly gathered in thick braided folds at the back of a well-shaped head. Imagine a pair of eyebrows which, in their pencilling, might have been painted by some too precise an artist, and beneath these a pair of dancing, merry eyes of a greyish blue colour, which were now and again hidden by the long drooping eyelashes. Imagine a straight, thoroughbred little nose (that would have defied the chisel of the finest sculptor to excel), and a prettily curved mouth, which, though the least thing large, lent expression rather than detracted from the *tout-ensemble*, and disclosed, when smiling, a good set of small white teeth; add to this a piquant chin, and lastly, imagine the entire picture delicately tinted by nature, revealing a fresh transparent complexion, and you have as truthful a likeness of Lizzie Rolfe as it is in my power to give you.

It should be explained that Gideon Rolfe and his wife were not old retainers at Barringtrees, Rolfe, until the last three years, having held the office of head gamekeeper to an old county family in Sussex. But the sudden break up of that establishment had thrown him out of place; and Squire Grayle, hearing of his good character and excellent qualifications from the family itself, with whom he happened to be acquainted, had offered him the same post at Barringtrees. Hence it happened that the lovely Lizzie was an innovation in the neighbourhood, and her great beauty and superior appearance speedily attracted considerable notice; for, as she grew older, she improved in looks, so that her comeliness



soon became quite a byword amongst the good folks thereabouts.

The contrast between Hector Grayle and the game-keeper's daughter, thus seated together by the fire, was rather striking; Hector's colouring being fair by comparison, and more after the Saxon type, with auburn hair, deep blue eyes, and a complexion which was almost too pink and white for a man. Being only in his twenty-first year, however, the pink-and-whiteness was more the colour of a youthful skin than that arising from a delicate constitution. A tall, handsome young fellow, something over six feet in height, with regular features and a good figure, Hector Grayle was a splendid specimen of the flower of England's youth. Such a fair exterior, moreover, was by no means belied by his inward character, which, upright, noble, and generous as it was, caused him to be idolized by his own family, and loved and respected by every one who knew him.

"Well, old man!" cried he, as Clement Mountjoy drove up in his dogcart; "you're a nice sort of fellow to keep one waiting like this."

"Very sorry, Hec, upon my word," replied Clement, throwing the reins to his groom, and diving into the back of the cart for his gun-case; "I couldn't get off before—everything seemed to conspire against it at the last moment."

"Well, better late than never," rejoined the other, as Clement dismounted; "come along. Here, Phillips will take this for you," he added, handing a cartridge-bag to the keeper. "What a glorious day! We're only just going to walk up one or two fields of mustard, you know, and some outlying mangolds on the other side, but we shall get some sport."

"Rather," observed Clement, smiling; "I knew those same mangolds and mustard-fields. There's shooting enough for a dozen guns."

"I believe there is, and we shall pick up something on the way," replied his companion, as they walked along briskly towards the quarter indicated, followed by Phillips, two or three beaters, and the dogs. "Other fellows couldn't come to day, so I thought you and I would have a bit of fun by ourselves. Look out!" Bang! bang! and on to the game-stick Phillips placed the first brace of partridges, the result of a right and left from his young master's gun. "I say, Clem, we're going to begin the coverts in a few days," added Hector, "when I hope Sir Francis will be able to get over."

"I hope he will; but, poor old boy! he's such an awful martyr to gout, you know. However, you may depend upon it he will if he can."

As the two young men walked side by side the difference between them was very marked, even to the most casual observer. While Hector Grayle's aristocratic bearing, and *distingué* appearance were so conspicuous, his friend was exactly the reverse, and one would scarcely have taken him for a sprig of the nobility at a first glance. Ungainly in his figure, uncouth in his dress (invariably several seasons behind the fashion) Clement Mountjoy was somewhat an oddity to look at; but notwithstanding that his face was rather plain, it wore a good-natured, kindly expression, and this gave an index to his general character, which abounded in good qualities. In short, taking him altogether, Clement was, as Hector always pronounced him, "one of the best fellows that ever breathed."

The two friends and their small retinue now disappear over the brow of a neighbouring hill, so we will wish

them good day and good sport, which, by the way, they decidedly had, if one may judge from the entry in the gamebook afterwards; inasmuch as Barringtrees might, for its splendid shooting at any rate, almost endorse Grumpy Grayle's quotation, and claim to be one of the finest estates in England.

## CHAPTER V.

## CRUTCH HUT.

"I have no wife nor children, good or bad, to provide for; a mere spectator of other men's fortunes and adventures, and how they play their parts."—*Burton*.

"Something like

That voice, methinks, I should have somewhere heard."

*Dryden.*

CRUTCH HUT—so called by its factitious owner on account of his having superintended its building while obliged to hobble about on one leg and a crutch, from the effects of premature gout—was a queer little crib, which looked something like a cross between a mammoth bee-hive and a miniature villa, if such can be imagined, and contained a very limited number of apartments, few of them big enough to swing a cat in.

The furniture of the sitting-rooms—there were two—was incongruous in the extreme; and Mr. Andrew Grayle's sanctum was as different from the other as a lady's boudoir is from a room in a little lodging-house; indeed, the latter more resembled "a furnished apartment to let" than anything else. The proprietor had considerable taste for the antique, and distributed round this sanctum were carved bookshelves and cabinets of the most fantastic patterns, which he had collected by degrees from different curiosity-shops in his wanderings. These cabinets, &c.,

were filled with old books, old china, old bronzes, and various articles of *vertu*, for Grumpy possessed a hoard of valuable rarities, and was very proud of his collection, though he enjoyed it much as a miser does his wealth, since Crutch Hut was nearly destitute of visitors.

This limited apartment—which did duty for museum, picture-gallery, library, dining-room, and smoking-room—its owner had overcrowded with furniture, and made it appear rather like a second-hand warehouse in Tottenham Court Road; but throughout there prevailed the same taste for quaint antique carvings, though their beauty was rather lost in the general chaos.

Andrew Grayle never went into society now by any chance, and, as I have said, scarcely ever had a visitor to his house; but of late years he had become rather tired of his own company, and on a few occasions he *did* attempt a little entertainment at the Hut; but then it was only with the tenants and such-like, and as a rule, in the old-fashioned tea and crumpet style, which he much preferred. But what was done at Crutch Hut was always well done, for Grumpy was somewhat of a sybarite—or, as he remarked jocularly, very much given to home comforts, though until he set up shop for himself home comforts had not been very much given to him—and occasionally the so-called modest tea resolved itself into an elaborate kind of supper, as in the present instance.

Except for the crowded state of the room, everything was very cheery and comfortable; not only the edibles, but the appurtenances (more than half the battle)—bright lamp, bright silver, bright table-cloth, bright fire, bright everything; and it was wonderful how well the Hut did do things, considering the limited staff of domestics, which consisted of an old bousekeeper and a maid of all work. The former was a faithful servant who had lived



at the Hall, and been in the family almost as long as her master, to whom she was devoted, having followed him when he transferred his abode to Crutch Hut. Leaving the rough work to her subordinate, Mrs. Cole cooked his meals, superintended his wardrobe—what there was of it—kept his accounts, and established herself generally as his sole confidential adviser—a good sort of creature altogether, but becoming a little querulous and arbitrary from long service and old age. Mary, the under-servant, had rather a rough time of it both with Mrs. Cole and her master, who were regular slave-drivers; but being a girl out of the village, and an unsophisticated creature with no ideas beyond the local grocer's shop and post-office, her ambition did not soar very high, and never suggested that she might possibly better herself if she tried. Grumpy bullied this girl fearfully when in a bad temper, though he would chuck her familiarly under the chin and call her "Polly" when in a good humour, declaring that if she hadn't green eyes, a flat nose, and red hair (his particular aversion), she wouldn't be bad-looking; all which doubtful compliments Polly accepted gratefully enough, glad even of such left-handed ones, so long as "master wasn't in one of his sulks." An ancient black cat—in the chronic condition of being curled up by the fireplace—a couple of noisy canaries, and a savage mongrel, chained up outside, completed the establishment. Nor was there any chance of its being increased, since its owner had settled down into a confirmed old bachelor, wedded to celibacy, his curiosity-shop, and that one other idea—succession to the property. Fifteen years had not made much difference in Grumpy, beyond a little increased rotundity and a few extra grey hairs, and he still believed he would outlive every one, for he never had an ache or pain, except an occasional twinge of gout, which

being hereditary, he was rather proud of than otherwise. All the same his monomania had cooled down a little since Hector had persisted in growing up contrary to prophecy.

"Wretched weed, though! regular lamp-post!" muttered the old fool; "never can come to anything. Umph! George gone—vanished—dead by now, for a thousand—the Squire, pooh! case of creaky gates, but must come off the hinges soon," and so on. Nevertheless, these cogitations were not quite so perpetual, nor carried on with such confident emphasis as heretofore.

"Now then, Polly, look alive," cried Grumpy, "put that lobster *mayonnaise* on the sideboard, and go and draw some of the old ale. I say, what are you doing there, Mrs. Cole?"

"Only trying to make a bit of room, sir," replied the housekeeper. "Here, Mary, lend a hand here first," and they proceeded to wheel a superfluous cabinet, elaborately carved, through the door towards the drawing-room.

"Look here, I won't have that moved—" began Grumpy.

"Nonsense, sir," quietly returned Mrs. Cole; "when you *do* have a bit of company you must give 'em room to stir, and you're so crammed full of these gim-cracks a body can't turn." So she carried her point, as she generally did.

"Not much to be found fault with at the Hut, I take it," muttered Grumpy, proudly surveying the apartment—"everything in its way perfect."

"Well, *I* think everythink in one's way's a noosance," said Mrs. Cole, half catching his remark, as she and Mary wheeled out the cabinet. "There! that's better, I'm sure," she exclaimed, returning; "and now, sir, don't the table look beautiful?"

"Splendiferous!" acquiesced her master.

"Do you get into the drawin'-room, then, to receive your guests, sir—"

"Oh, bosh! bosh! old Sam Sickles and his wife aren't particular."

"But *you* ought to be, sir. Never do things higger pigger" (whatever she meant); "go and receive 'em like a gentleman."

"But they've not come yet," expostulated Grumpy, "and I hate sticking in that beastly room."

"They'll be here directly, sir; you'd better go," urged Mrs. Cole, with calm authority; and the obedient master stumped off, leaving his housekeeper to complete her arrangements in the parlour.

"The state apartment," as Grumpy humorously termed the uncomfortable little drawing-room on the opposite side of the passage, was as scantily furnished as his sanctum was overcrowded. Since it was seldom used, he had contented himself with ordering for its equipment, from a wholesale firm, the inevitable bright green suite, commonly seen in lodging-houses and small cockney villas, consisting of six articles of torture, yclept chairs, another article falsely aspiring to the name of sofa, and two monstrosities with arms which you could see grossly belied their appellation of easy before you tried them. But our friend thought them quite good enough for his visitors, when he had any. The first-mentioned articles were the most untempting looking things imaginable, with great overstuffed seats, that appeared as if they had been starved, and then suddenly given a heavy meal of wool and horsehair, which had distended them out of all proportion, reminding one of a greedy puppy after a gigantic gorge; and when you sat down on them, their skeleton backs stuck spitefully into your spine, as though resenting the liberty.

The brown holland coverings, which always draped this unique furniture, had been taken off for once in a way, and each article had budded forth into its normal state of verdancy, since guests were expected at Crutch Hut that evening.

Shortly afterwards, the aristocratic company, as Grumpy ironically called it, arrived. Curious articles all. Item first—Mr. Samuel Sickles, a jolly old-fashioned Suffolk farmer, round as a tub, with a rubicund countenance, like a setting full moon; blue swallow-tailed coat, brass buttons, gaiters, knee-breeches, and all complete, and glorying in a brogue that you might have cut with a knife. Item second—Mrs. Samuel Sickles, a prototype of her husband as to face and expression—grown so by marriage perhaps—dressed in pea-green silk, with black mittens, a false front bound with velvet, and a huge glass brooch at her throat, like a little horse-pond; the same dialect, too, also contracted by marriage, no doubt, for she was not Suffolk born. Item third—Mrs. Corcoran, Sam Sickles' sister, a widow, and a very severe-looking female indeed, with black points, dressed to match; not the least like her brother—in fact, a sort of modern Medea in appearance—age, the shady side of sixty or thereabouts, but not looking so much, though the raven hair was streaked here and there with silver threads. Item fourth and last—Mr. Simon Sickles, only son of his father and mother; a mild yahoo, with straight hair, well plastered down each side of a face, which, shining inanely with soap and simplicity, four kicks in a mud wall would have grossly flattered;—and dressed in humble imitation of the prevailing fashion, by way of contrast to his father's antediluvian get up—an imitation which his manners and colloquial vernacular rendered the more ridiculous. In short, taking them altogether, it was evi-



dent that Grumpy Grayle delighted in curiosities, animate as well as inanimate; but he had not bargained for the two last-mentioned guests; these, it appeared, had been brought by Mr. Sickles as substitutes for somebody else.

"Good evenun', Mister Grayle" (he pronounced it Grile), said the old farmer, as he entered, "I hope we ain't arter our toime. You'll exkewse me a bringun' my sister and my booy, 'cos ould Master Tunnup, he couldn't come, he have got the rewmattucks so wonnerful bad, and my gal she worn't able 'cos—"

"Don't mention it, don't mention it," cried his host, cutting him short, and welcoming the substitutes with a good grace, "very glad to see you all, I'm sure."

Presently, taking the word of command from Mrs. Cole, Grumpy proceeded to transfer his guests from the comfortable drawing-room to the *sanctum sanctorum*, where they quickly ensconced themselves round the hospitable suppertable, which groaned with good things.

Mr. Samuel Sickles' face beamed again as he took in the tempting viands with eyes and nose on entering the room—Mrs. Samuel Sickles' face following suit with a modified beam—while Mr. Simon Sickles' face literally shone with unctuous delight as they took their seats; and on commencing operations, the yahoo, bewildered and uncertain for a moment what to begin upon, suddenly went at it with a vengeance, as if his body were a sack, and he had to fill it against time.

"They're a goin to shoot some o' the woods to-morrow, I hear, Mr. Grile," observed Sickles senior, as soon as a square foot of brawn would allow him to speak.

"Are they?" granted Grumpy churlishly, filling Mrs. Corcoran's glass as she sat on his left. "Umph! hope they mayn't shoot each other then, that's all."



"They du saye there' a wonnerful sight o' people arsked to stye at the Hall for the shootun'," resumed the farmer; "leastways gintlemen."

"I dessay," growled the host, in an undertone. "I know *I'm* not."

"Don't you shoot yourself, Mr. Grayle?" inquired Mrs. Corcoran.

"If I didn't somebody else might for me," smiled Grumpy, intending to make a joke. "No, ma'am, I don't care for these days of battues and breechloaders. Who's staying at the house? do you know, Sickles?"

"Nit rightly, Mr. Grile; though ould Rolfe did tell me. Some from Lun'nun, I believe, a Cap'en some'at or other, and two or three more—a comin', that is, if they baint come."

At this moment the loud barking of the mongrel outside interrupted the conversation, and then a carriage was heard to stop at the door.

"Hulloa! who can that be?" exclaimed the host, looking round the table. "I don't expect any one else."

"Somebody lost their wye, I reckon," ventured Simon, as he finished his third plateful. "That's as dark out to-night as the insoide of my westcut pockut."

"Go and see who it is, Mrs. Cole," said her master, still wondering.

On the front door being opened by the housekeeper, a rude November gust nearly blew out the lamp in the little entrance passage.

"Can you put us on the road for Barringtrees Hall, please?" called a voice from the Cimmerian darkness. "This driver's a new man; his lamps have gone out, and the night's as black as pitch."

As the voice reached the little dining-room Mrs. Cor-

coran pricked up her ears for a moment, for it seemed as if the tones were familiar to her, though she dismissed the idea as improbable immediately afterwards, or only looked upon it as a coincidence.

"I'll put him roight, Mr. Grile, don't you trouble," said the yahoo, lurching out to the front door. "Look here, mister!" he cried, addressing himself indefinitely to the driver or his fare, "yow can't du wrong if ye foller this here ro'd strite as iver yow can goo, till yow git to the park wall; keep up to the left along that till ye foind some grit iron gates, go threw them up the avernoo, and there ye are."

Meanwhile the cabman had availed himself of Mrs. Cole's offer, and had relit his lamps; so the benighted fly started once more on its way.

Now even a cormorant can't go on for ever; the most voracious appetite in the world must be appeased at last by a surfeit of good things; and Mr. Sickles and his son began at last to feel every button of their waistcoats on double duty, and could do no more than toy with some of the substantial delicacies yet untried, seeming as if they would say, "Oh, I only wish you had come a little earlier." Grumpy Grayle, noticing this, began to rally them, for he was no niggard host, and liked to see justice done to his table; but since he could only elicit a chorus of "No more for me, thank yer, Mr. Grile, I ha' done be-ewtiffle, thank yer," he gave it up as a bad job.

"Corcoran!" exclaimed he presently, and pursing up his mouth reflectively; "Corcoran! that's not a common name, ma'am," he added, turning to its owner; "I've heard it before—can't think where."

"My husband was an Irishman, Mr. Grayle," remarked Mrs. Corcoran. "Its a hard story for a body to tell, but he was suspected and tried for an Agrarian outrage

some years ago, which broke his heart, poor man, for he died soon afterwards. Perhaps that's what you were thinking of."

"No—no, that isn't it. It's a *Mrs.* Corcoran I'm thinking of, not a *Mr.* Corcoran."

"Oh, indeed, sir. Well, I'm the only *Mrs.* Corcoran I know of in our county."

"What county? this county, do you mean?"

"No, *Mr.* Grayle; I was born here, it's true, but Kent is my county now, and has been for years."

"Ah, that's it!" cried Grumpy, suddenly inspired. "That must be it; Kent, of course. Do you remember the name of Pullerton?"

"To be sure I do."

"And you remember the Pullerton Trust?"

"To be sure I do," she repeated, thinking how curious it was that that very subject had been running in her head a minute before.

"The Pullerton Trust! that's what I was thinking of. I was one of the trustees, you know."

"So I understood at the time, sir."

"But how were you connected with that, *Mrs.* Corcoran? I forget."

"Well," replied the woman, hesitating a little, and dropping her dark eyes as Grumpy peered inquisitively into her face; "if you remember I gave evidence at the coroner's inquest."

"Exactly—exactly, of course you did," cut in her host, as the recollection flashed across him. "Um—ah! sad case, very. Railway accident or something, wasn't it? It all comes back to me now. Absolute reversion of 40,000*l.* to the brother. Well, well, a fat sorrow's better than a lean one, and no doubt the brother found it so."

"Half-brother," observed Mrs. Corcoran, correcting him."

"Half-brother, was it? Oh, well, as I was saying, no doubt the half-brother found it so; 40,000*l.* isn't to be sneezed at."

"No, indeed; and he'd know how to spend it well, bless his heart!"

"Oh, you think so? Well, of course I can't say anything about that. I was very glad to be released from the Trust, that's all I know. Hate responsibility, and I never would have undertaken it only old Mrs. Pullerton's husband was a great friend of mine. But what has become of this Mr.—Mr. What's-his-name? It's a good many years ago now, and I've never seen nor heard of him since."

"You mean Mr. Denby," said Mrs. Corcoran. "I've not seen him very lately either. He seems almost to have forgotten his old nurse now," she added, as if to herself; "but he's going on prosperous enough, I believe—any way I hope so."

"A favourite of yours, it appears?" remarked the host; then aside, "got a largess out of that affair, I'll be bound."

"He ought to be, Mr. Grayle; I dandled him when he was a mite of a baby. Ah, he's an officer now—a captaining. Perhaps you didn't hear, though, he came into another bit o'money afterwards from some distant relation—"

"How should I? I know nothing about the man," interrupted Grumpy.

"Whose name he tacks on to his own," continued she. "But there, he wants all he can get, I'll be bound; for they say he does go the pace. Bless him! a real gentleman, every inch of him! Let him spend the money, if he likes; it's his own, and why shouldn't he enjoy it?"

"Very true, very true; why shouldn't he? Life's short enough, in all conscience. My motto is, live while you may, you can take naught away. Though, deuce knows, I've little enough to live on, and shall leave little enough behind me when I go."

During this abstract conversation Simon Sickles and his parents had listened in open-mouthed vacancy, thoroughly mystified, and feeling very much "out of it;" but they were soon set going again when their host proposed a little smoke—with the permission of the ladies—and some hot punch to wind up the evening with.

Then such a brew did he and Mrs. Cole mix for them as warmed, with a generous glow, the cockles of their hearts, and effectually kept out the cold night air when they returned home in the pony-chaise an hour or two afterwards.



## CHAPTER VI.

## FIVE HUNDRED HEAD BEFORE LUNCHEON.

"'Twas of old by God decreed  
That birds for man's support may bleed."

*Mant.*

THE following morning a large party assembled for breakfast at Barringtrees Hall, consisting chiefly of gentlemen invited to shoot. Three or four had run down from town overnight, including Colonels Gaskill and Flashman of the Guards, and Captain Heffernan of the Line, all keen sportsmen and crack shots. Sir Francis Mountjoy was there too—the gout having given him leave of absence for the day—and although he was an infirm old "fogey," something over seventy, the respite seemed to have temporarily rejuvenated him, for he had already discussed a cutlet and a devilled kidney with the healthy appetite of an undergraduate.

"Dear Sir Francis," exclaimed Lady Mountjoy from the other side of the table—a vivacious woman, thirty years younger than her husband—"it delights me to see you really enjoy your breakfast; I wish you could shoot every day."

"So do I, my lady," mumbled Sir Francis, as he munched his toast; "but we old birds are horribly handicapped with gout and *anno domini*."

Lady Mountjoy smiled at him lovingly, all eyes and teeth—very fine ones they were, too—and she had a habit of flashing them all at once at any one when she spoke, by way of showing them off at the slightest provocation. Decidedly a handsome woman, a juvenile forty, painfully energetic in every movement, and, as she made the most commonplace observation, bright flashes of lightning jumped out of her great black eyes, while her remarks and ideas seemed all zigzag like the flight of a snipe, if I may so describe them, first in one direction, then in another; her conversation being as harum scarum as her character. Lady Mountjoy was an enterprising person who had done a little bit of everything in her time, especially in the way of sport, from salmon-fishing in the Shannon down to ferreting rabbits on the Suffolk warrens.

“Are you going to have a shot to-day, Lady Mountjoy?” inquired the Rev. Arthur Tewkesley, Gertrude Grayle’s brother, who was sitting next to her.

“I think I shall,” flashed her ladyship, “if the gentlemen won’t mind my going with the guns.”

Mr. Tewkesley thought they probably might, but did not choose to say so. He was one of those who considered, and very rightly too, that a lady is decidedly out of place in the shooting-field—except, of course, at luncheon by the covert-side—and he invariably discouraged his sister and Agnes Grayle from setting the example.

“You see, I am got up for the occasion,” continued Lady Mountjoy, with a perfect battery of electric sparks, and displaying a sporting-looking jacket she wore; “but I believe Hector does not like ladies shooting, so I dare say I shall only look on after all. Tell me,” she exclaimed, flying off at a tangent, “who is that *very* good-looking man opposite?”

"Do you mean next to the Squire?"

"No; *he's* not good-looking. That's Gussy Gaskill, the ugliest man in the guards. I mean on the other side of your sister."

"Oh! I see; that's a Captain Heffernan, of the—ar—something foot. I forget his regiment at this moment."

"Particularly handsome; don't you consider him?"

"Well, yes, I suppose he is; the ladies all think so, I believe."

"And they're the best judges, Mr. Tewkesley. You men never admire each other, I notice."

"No, I suppose we don't—not enthusiastically, at least. However, he seems an uncommonly nice fellow, and appears to have made great friends with the Squire and Gertrude when they were in town."

"Oh, indeed! perhaps he admires Agnes?"

"That I can't say."

"Eligible?" and the eyes and teeth flashed interrogatively.

"Very, I understand."

The object of their attention was at this moment engaged in conversation with Mrs. Grayle senior, at the lower end of the table.

"I hope I am forgiven, Mrs. Grayle," he remarked, with a pleasant smile, "for coming in with the *entrées* last night."

"Certainly, Captain Heffernan," returned the lady of the house, very graciously—for her; "how could you help it?"

"Not very well; my train was forty minutes late, and then the fellow who drove me from the station didn't know the way, and mismanaged his lamps, so we came to a standstill in the dark. If it hadn't been for a little friendly farmhouse, where they put us right, I shouldn't have arrived here till this morning."

Yes, I think my reader, of whichever sex, would have agreed with Lady Mountjoy that Captain Hefferman was an exceedingly good-looking man. You could read Aldershot in his face at a glance, by the trim mutton-chop whisker and well-cultivated heavy moustache; these, and his closely-cut hair, being as nearly black as possible, in keeping with his eyes, which gave rather a stern look to the face while in repose; but when animated his features relaxed into an agreeable, good-humoured expression. He was a man of about three-and-thirty, with plenty of *savoir-vivre*, plenty of money (or supposed to have plenty), plenty of anecdote and small talk, and invariably well-dressed; altogether, one may say, a popular man in the world in which he moved, both civil and military.

"And what's the programme to-day, Hector?" inquired Sir Francis, as he and two or three others now got up from the breakfast-table.

"We propose to have a couple of partridge drives first of all, Sir Francis, just to get the eye in, you know," replied Hector; "and after that we're going to beat the High Woods, which I fancy will be as much as we can get through to-day."

"Well, my boy, we oughtn't to lose time, ought we?" remarked the old baronet, eager for the fray, and preparing to trot off to the gun-room.

"No, we'll make a start directly; as soon as these hungry soldiers have done crunching their bones," observed Hector, indicating Gaskill and Flashman, who were still busy taking in stores in the shape of some broiled pheasant.

"I'm ready," exclaimed Lady Mountjoy, jumping up like a jack-in-the-box in front of Hector, who was crossing behind her chair, and electrifying him on the spot.

"But," she added, with a most fascinating flash, more like summer lightning this time, "you won't have any ladies to day perhaps?"

"Certainly, Lady Mountjoy—only—only the difficulty is—ar—," hesitated Hector.

"That you don't want us; precisely," she continued, putting out the electric lights suddenly, and lowering her eyelids; "you're a good creature not to say so, though you think it. Never mind, I forgive you—but I *must* walk with my dear Sir Francis, and take care of him till we get to the ground, mustn't I, Sir Francis?"

"No, no, not at all, my lady," cried Sir Francis, as he was leaving the room; "don't you put yourself out, I shall do very well." And he disappeared quickly, determined not to be taken in tow.

The rest of the breakfast party followed suit, and the votaries of Nimrod betook themselves straightway to look out their respective weapons, afterwards assembling in front of the Hall, preparatory to the start. Presently two more sportsmen (a couple of hunting parsons from the neighbourhood) drove up the avenue and completed the complement, which numbered nine guns; none too many for the extensive coverts they were going to shoot through. The Squire himself had retired into the rear rank with the ladies during the last few years, since failing health of late had caused him to give up shooting altogether.

Although our November comes in for nearly as much abuse as March, and deservedly so perhaps, yet it sometimes redeems its character, and gives us a few bright genial days by way of contrast to the traditional fogs and dreary drizzle. When it does condescend thus to throw off its sombre grey mantle, what can be more glorious than one of those still autumn mornings, the atmosphere bright and clear, without a breath of wind, and the ground



just crisp from a slight coating of frost? Then as the foot disturbs the crackling masses of dead leaves, which cover the dank sward in profusion here and there, the fresh odour that rises, and the rustling sound itself, recall pleasant memories to the sportsman of shooting days gone by, and give a welcome reminder of another season's arrival.

Just such an auspicious morning greeted our party as they left the Hall and wended their way across the park. The beaters had been sent on ahead, ready to take up their positions in skirmishing order for the first drive, where they waited patiently for the signal from the head keeper, old Gideon Rolfe, that the guns had duly arrived at their posts.

What a day it was for partridge driving, thought Hector Grayle; if anything, almost too quiet, and the man who could not account for every three out of five cartridges that morning, ought to drop his breech-loader and take to a pop-gun.

No time was lost, as there was much to be done, and in less than a quarter of an hour after they quitted the Hall every one was in position. Then almost immediately was heard the crack of the first gun, resounding sharply through the still, frosty air, followed by another and another. "Over! o-o-ver," shouted the beaters; "o-o-var! mark o-o-o-var!" in all the different Suffolk intonations. Bang! bang-bang-bang! bang-bang! bang! like a *feu-de-joie* went the guns; and as the birds literally swarmed overhead, nearly a dozen falling to the first volley, the ground was quickly strewed with their little plump brown bodies, which fluttered here and there along the line until life had become extinct.

The first drive finished, nineteen and a half brace and four hares were counted out as the result. Not very bad, one would think, even in these days of high preserving

and breech-loaders. Yet Hector and old Rolfe were scarcely satisfied ; for with nine guns, and the very best drive on the estate, they certainly expected more. Knowing he had only missed two or three birds himself, on occasions when he couldn't get his cartridges in quick enough, Hector Grayle began mentally to consign one or two of his friends on the spot to the said pop-gun, and it must be owned there were some very indifferent shots among the party. Sir Francis could not hit a barn-door ; Clement, though he always shot at Barringtrees, was not much better ; while Tewkesley and one of the parsons were both terribly slow, thus leaving the balance of the sportsmen to do the greater part of the slaughter between them.

Now it is all very well for you, Master Hector, with your unerring aim, to think that a man ought to account for every three out of his five cartridges fired ; but partridge driving, even on the stillest day, is by no means easy work, and it takes long practice, and a cool nerve, combined with a quick hand and eye, to make sure of three-fifths, or even one-half of the birds you shoot at. Either they fly too high—though this is generally on a windy day—or else they come right at your head, whirring round your ears like a swarm of bees, quite putting you off, and making you go for the “brown” haphazard, when you probably miss the whole lot, and serve you right! or perhaps send away two or three wounded, which don't count to *your* gun (mind, reader, I am only addressing myself to the “duffer”); or else they come just between you and the next man, and not being quite sure whether it is his shot or yours, you wait for him, and very likely lose your chance altogether; or else on a windy day, when the birds come overhead like flashes of “greased lightning,” you endeavour to adopt certain rules laid down

by some celebrated sportsman, who would inculcate in your mind his own theories—universal ones, no doubt, but not easily acted upon. First, as the feathered bullets come straight to you, you fire at them, according to instructions, point blank, or the least trifle above them, depending on the pace you fancy they are flying—well and good, you may or may not bring down one—then, as they dart past you to right or left, you remember to fire a couple of feet or so in front, sometimes a good deal more; or, as they are going straight away, you aim a little underneath to catch them at the apex of your line of fire and their line of flight. Excellent principles, no doubt, if you can only recollect them at the time, but as a rule, not attended with very satisfactory results, except to the skilful sportsman. No, the rank bad shot may improve a little by practice, but he cannot be taught; for the skill of the crack shot is entirely instinctive, and his hand and eye work together with a rapidity and precision which can scarcely be acquired.

Anxious to get to the coverts as soon as possible, since time is precious in the short November days, Hector gave the word to Rolfe for one more drive only, and this to be arranged so as to bring them in close proximity to the High Woods, where they could commence operations without delay.

This second drive, though unexpectedly attended by better results than the first, was soon concluded; and all the guns, except two who were appointed to walk with the beaters, quickly took up the positions allotted to them, outside one of the woods which was to be beaten before luncheon, when Hector displayed the skill and caution of "Cunctator" Fabius in posting his men, though not quite so slow about it. And now began the real business of the day, and so felt each sportsman as he stood at his

corner, anxiously awaiting the forward march of the "brushers,"<sup>1</sup> and the first break of game.

Suspense in general may well be termed the toothache of the mind, but the suspense experienced outside a covert, waiting for the first shot, is a pleasurable one indeed. What a delicious feeling of quiet, suppressed excitement it is, that standing on the tiptoe of expectation by the outskirts of a wood which you know to be literally teeming with game! More especially on a bright, frosty day, when the rime on the trees is melting and dripping under the influence of a genial sun, and the rarified atmosphere redolent with the freshness of autumnal nature.

All at once a Babel of mysterious sounds arises from the beaters; a rattling of sticks, and cries of "Hi—hi—hi—hi! ho—ho—ho—ho! hare—hare—hare! rabbut—rabbut!" and so on, answered by the "cluck-cluck!" of the terrified pheasants as they are driven through the wood; which, in turn, is responded to here and there by the battery of breech-loaders outside, and rocketeer after rocketeer, sailing overhead, is brought down "all of a heap," rebounding from mother earth with the force of its fall. Every man this day is expected to do his duty; but every man need be an Argus to do it thoroughly! for what with keeping one eye overhead at the rocketers, and the other peering into the thick undergrowth, watching for ground game which breaks in every direction, you have a warm time of it indeed; and to an old soldier who has seen fighting, a big *battue* reminds him forcibly of the hottest action he ever was in, except for its one-sidedness.

"Look out, Sir Francis! well tried!" cried Clement, as he "wiped his father's eye" at a large hare which was lolloping past.

<sup>1</sup> A local term for "beaters."



"Mark cock!" called some one else, and out flew a woodcock straight in front of Clement, who missed both barrels like a man, leaving it for Colonel Gaskill, that gentleman performing the same office for him, as he, Clement, had just done for his father.

"There you go, Sir Francis!" cried Clement again, "right over you."

Bang! bang! went both barrels from the old baronet, and away sailed a lucky pheasant, minus his tail, but none the worse otherwise. In truth Sir Francis had had about enough of it, and was longing for luncheon, for which the inner man, too, was calling out loudly; and his guns—he had taken the precaution to have two—were both so confoundedly hot he could scarcely hold them; more from repeatedly blazing away into the air than into the game, I'm afraid; but that is a matter of detail.

At length the firing ceased, the beat was finished, and the beaters emerged from the covert. Away trotted Sir Francis forthwith to look for the ladies and the luncheon, not caring to wait to see the game counted out, for he felt conscious that he had hardly contributed his share to the list of killed.

A capital bag it was; and Hector took a pride in having the carcasses stretched out in two or three long rows, which gave the following results: forty-two and a half brace of partridges, two hundred and thirty-seven pheasants, a hundred and forty-nine hares, five woodcocks, and twenty-four rabbits; all told, making a grand total of exactly five hundred head.

"And now, gentlemen, to luncheon!" exclaimed Hector, after they had gloated over the slaughter—whereupon the remaining sportsmen quickly followed in the wake of Sir Francis, each with as keen an appetite as his neighbour.



## CHAPTER VII.

## A CHARGE OF "NUMBER SIX."

"Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances ;  
Of moving accidents by flood and field."  
*Shakspeare.*

ALTHOUGH Hector Grayle himself was no advocate for the luxurious picnic which so often in these times forms an important item in the programme of a day's shooting, yet for the sake of the ladies and the Squire, who could not participate in the sport, he did not exercise his prerogative, as master of the ceremonies, by opposing it.

As may be seen, Mr. Grayle entirely yielded up the reins of government to his grandson on all shooting occasions, and Hector proved himself worthy of the post.

Sir Francis Mountjoy, guided by instinct or appetite, was not long in finding out the luncheon party; and a snug little bivouac the ladies had formed in a picturesque nook close at hand. As the old baronet drew near the group, the grateful fragrance of some delicious Irish stew greeted his nose, and caused him to cast a wistful glance at the huge bright copper saucepan in which it was simmering.

"Come along, Sir Francis," cried her ladyship, skipping towards him; "here is a special place reserved

for you," and she playfully pressed him down on a convenient mound beside her, which she had thoughtfully covered with a cushion and a plaid. "Now tell me, dear Sir Francis, what have you shot?"

"Do you mean me individually, or the whole party?" asked Sir Francis, as he settled down.

"Firstly, as to yourself, then?" said her ladyship, flashing a loving glance at the old gentleman.

"Well, 'pon my word, I hardly know; all I can tell you is, my guns got so hot they scorched my hands, so I suppose I must have shot a good deal, ahem! As to the bag, I didn't stop to see it counted. But here they all come."

The rest of the party opportunely arrived just as the servants completed the laying out of the *al fresco* repast; and if they were hungry as hunters before, how much more so did the sight of that insinuating stew and other good things make them feel when they joined the bivouac.

Hector triumphantly announced the result of the morning's work, and as the gentlemen quickly took their seats, each felt he had done his share more or less—some a little less perhaps—and had fairly earned his luncheon.

Lady Mountjoy telegraphed a significant glance at Mr. Tewkesley as she saw Captain Heffernan making straight for a vacancy beside Agnes—the very spot poor Clement was going to dive for when he was anticipated.

Now, it may not be amiss to mention here, that the single-hearted Clement had for a long while cherished a strong affection for Agnes Grayle, although he had never formally declared to her the state of his feelings; nor did he indeed realize those feelings himself until now, when she had gone through her first season in London,

and brought many admirers to her feet, among them being the handsome Captain Heffernan.

Clement Mountjoy had been thrown a good deal with Hector and Agnes during their childhood, and the latter had learned to look upon him in the light of a brother, and cared for him as such ; though he found out, poor boy ! as time went on, that *his* love did not stop short at the Platonic point. Then began that secret gnawing at the heart, as he watched the fair object of his affections eagerly sought after by others, and likely to be soon snatched up as a prize in the matrimonial lottery. And yet he had made no sign, whether from a diffident feeling as to his own worth, or from a misgiving as to the result of an open declaration, can only be surmised.

Giorgione would have gloried in painting the picture of Agnes Grayle, with that rich auburn hair and deep violet eyes he so loved to portray as the type of Venetian beauty. Lithe and sylph-like in figure—not tall, exactly, but above the average height—she was Hector's sister, every inch of her—almost identical in colouring and feature, and as like him as it is possible for a woman to be like a man.

Ah ! proud mother indeed are you, gentle Gertrude, as you sit there, with your soft eyes lovingly watching those comely figures. Fair portraits of yourself in the best days—not so long gone by—and now filling up in your heart that cruel void which George so wantonly had caused. Foolish, forgiving woman that you are ! still trusting, still hoping, and for what ? Has not every trace been long since lost ? Has not his very name sunk into the cold silence of the grave ? And yet you cherish his worthless memory. Engraven deep on that faithful heart is the image of the husband, the father of those glorious children. Foolish, but noble woman ! surely

such simple devotion as yours deserves a better fate than to be thus wasted on so unworthy an object.

The luncheon was perforce a hurried scramble with the ravenous sportsmen, for Hector was not one to loiter on such a day; and being all impatience to continue business, he gave his myrmidons but little breathing time.

"Now, graufdfather," said he, rising from the ground, and lighting a cigarette, "we are going to beat that small wood over there to the right, for the benefit of the ladies; so, if you will take care of them, and " (lowering his voice, and glancing at Lady Mountjoy) "keep them at a respectful distance, they'll be able to see a little sport."

"Very well, my boy," replied the Squire; "gather your forces, and go ahead."

Now this same wood was only a bit of bye-covert, so to speak, and judiciously selected by Hector, since it could be quickly beaten, and thus afford the ladies an opportunity of witnessing some shooting before they returned to the house; the next big beat, moreover, being a considerable distance out of their way.

It was scarcely large enough to admit of all the guns being properly posted; but Hector, by skilful generalship, managed it somehow, though he left himself out in the cold.

Lady Mountjoy became quite excited as the shooting recommenced, and jumped and clapped her hands like a young school-girl. At luncheon she had longed to ask to have a shot, or take Sir Francis' place, since he had confessed himself knocked up, but had refrained when she remembered Hector's hesitation at breakfast; albeit to do her ladyship justice, her skill with the gun would have compared very favourably with that of her husband, or, indeed, any of the other duffers.

"Look, look, mamma!" cried Agnes, "that's another bird to Clem. Oh, how well they are shooting!"

"Too well," thought her mother, whose gentle nature would not allow her to appreciate the slaughter of the innocents. Indeed, she actually turned away her head when once the firing had begun.

"And just watch Captain Heffernan," exclaimed Agnes again, "how he knocks them over! He never seems to miss;" a faint blush suffusing her fair cheek as she spoke. "But where's Hector, grandpapa? I wanted so to see *him* shoot," she added, in a disappointed tone.

"On the other side, my dear, I suppose; or perhaps with the beaters."

"There!" cried her ladyship, suddenly, in great glee, "why, my dear Sir Francis has actually killed a hare all by himself!" and she flashed a look of triumph on her companions as the old baronet, by some lucky fluke, bowled puss over. "What do you think of *that*, Squire?"

"Very good, very good indeed, Lady Mountjoy," returned he, with a smile; adding, *sotto voce*, "The only wonder to me is how any one can ever miss the poor thing."

And yet, strange to say, puss often gets off scatheless.

"But what's the matter?" asked Agnes presently; "why don't they go on? They can't have finished yet; they've only just begun. And look! why are they all running round to that side?"

"I can't make it out," muttered Mr. Grayle, looking through a pair of binoculars he had brought with him.

"Ah! here comes Mr. Tewkesley," said Lady Mountjoy; "I suppose they *have* finished, then."

The gentleman mentioned, who was seen hurrying towards them, suddenly checked his pace as he drew near. Then an instinctive feeling came over more than



one of the party, as he approached, that something unusual must have happened; but they were quickly reassured when they heard his voice.

"We have done the little wood, ladies," exclaimed he cheerfully, and forcing a careless tone, though he could not conceal the pallor on his face. "I—I thought I would just—just let you know, and report the result. Come, Squire, we can talk about it as we go along. You mustn't allow the ladies to stay out too late in the cold—that is, I mean—the carriage will be ready by now, and—"

As he ceased speaking there certainly appeared something strange and mysterious in his manner, which did not entirely escape the others; but the off-hand tones, so cleverly managed, deceived them. Poor fellow! he had indeed a difficult part to play, and it would be no fault of his if he failed. It was with a feeling of intense relief, then, that he successfully persuaded the Squire and the ladies to move off and retrace their steps towards home.

"What is it?" asked a whispered voice by his side as they walked along. Turning, he saw Lady Mountjoy at his elbow, with an anxious look of inquiry in her dark eyes; "something has happened, I *know*—tell me."

"Hush! for Heaven's sake!" he returned in a hoarse undertone, and seizing her hand with a convulsive grasp as he gave a warning look towards the others; "you are right; but pray calm yourself—something *has* happened, but not to Sir Francis, or your son; they were on this side of the wood, as you no doubt observed. Now I must speak to the Squire alone—please join my sister and Agnes, and engage their attention; and, oh! Lady Mountjoy, be discreet, I implore you!"

Poor Lady Mountjoy! there was scarcely need for the admonition. She quite shuddered as he spoke, feeling

sure that some dreadful calamity had taken place, and longed to know what it was, though she feared to ask; but in obedience to the behest she resolved to be discretion itself, if for the first time in her life, and so at once joined the others in front.

"Squire, a word with you," said Tewkesley, in a whisper, touching his arm, and with an effort forcing a calmness he was far from feeling.

"What is the matter?" asked Mr. Grayle, in the same tone, dropping behind, and expecting something—he knew not what.

"Don't be alarmed, sir, at what I am going to tell you," continued Tewkesley; "bear up for the sake of the ladies, and pray get them away to the house as quickly as possible."

"Eh? what?" cried the Squire, startled at the other's words; "what's the matter? what has happened? quick, man, tell me!"

"Hush! don't let them hear you. It's nothing serious, I assure you"—his looks belied his words—"only a slight accident. I've sent for Dr. Whittle. See, there's the carriage waiting for you at the gates—drive the ladies home without any fuss, and return directly. I'm going on myself to the doctor's, to make sure."

How thankful Tewkesley felt as he caught sight of the barouche, which had been ordered to come for the ladies after luncheon to take them for a drive.

The Squire looked frightened and bewildered, but did not speak for a moment, expecting to hear further.

"Accident! but what—how—who?" inquired he anxiously, as Tewkesley hesitated; "don't keep me in suspense!"

"No, no, of course not!" returned poor Tewkesley; "but, as I said, it's nothing serious, you know; not the least cause for alarm—only I was afraid to let the ladies hear—"

"Confound it, sir!" exclaimed the old gentleman, losing patience; "will you tell me *who*?"

"Well, it appears Colonel Gaskill—no fault of his, poor fellow—shot into the covert, you see, and—and—by some unlucky chance, part of the charge has struck Hector—"

"Hector!" cried the Squire, staggering and nearly falling, when Tewkesley caught him by the arm; "my boy! my boy!"

"Mr. Grayle, don't give way, pray don't give way; they'll hear you," implored Tewkesley.

"Oh! it's worse than you say—I know it's worse than you say," moaned the Squire in anguish; "don't tell me; your face shows it."

"No, indeed you—you are mistaken," stammered the other; "you are are needlessly alarming yourself, I assure you; but such a shock—the very sight of blood, you know—would kill those gentle women."

"Yes, yes, you are right," murmured the poor old fellow, with sudden firmness; "they mustn't know it, not for the world—not yet, at least."

"That is right, Squire, be a man!" said Tewkesley encouragingly; and as they reached the carriage, Mr. Grayle recovered his composure with a powerful effort, though inwardly he fretted at the least delay.

"There, my dear," he said hurriedly, handing in Gertrude with the stoicism of Epictetus, "put that rug round you quickly, and get home out of this cold air as soon as possible."

"Are we not going for a drive, then, grandpapa?" asked Agnes, wondering at this sudden change of plans.

"No, my child, no," replied her grandfather, closing the door abruptly; "it's too late now, and much too cold."

"But are you not coming with us, dear?"

"I can't just now; I have to—I must get back to the woods, and give some orders about the game—home, Henry!" and at the "clck" of the coachman, the two powerful horses whisked off the barouche through the iron gates and down the avenue.

"God be praised!" murmured the clergyman as they disappeared—he having also excused himself from driving as preferring to walk. "That was bravely done, Mr. Grayle; and now, nerve yourself before you go down there," he continued, pointing to the wood. "Remember your boy is in God's hands;" then, as the old man bowed his grey head in silence, Tewkesley added, "I'll just run into the lodge, and tell them to take down some blankets and things, and, rely on me, the doctor shall be with you immediately. Two men have already been despatched, and I hope to meet him on the road."

So saying, he hurried into the keeper's cottage, hastily explained matters to Mrs. Rolfe, indicating where the things were to be taken, and afterwards rushed off in the direction of Dr. Whittle's house, which was some two miles off. He knew he could reach it quicker on foot than if he went all the way up to the Hall and waited for a horse to be saddled; besides, his Oxford training as a pedestrian stood him now in good stead.

Bloodshed in any shape is ever repugnant to a true woman's nature, be the cause what it may; and whether this accident proved a serious one or not, it was a merciful interposition of Providence that aided Tewkesley in his anxiety to prevent a harrowing scene, and his laudable endeavour to spare the ladies a painful spectacle.



How little in this active world of business and pleasure do we realize the fact that death and danger perpetually stalk abroad, besetting at every turn our path in life; and, comparatively speaking, what little reckoning do we take of the numberless risks daily incurred while ardently pursuing our different amusements and employments; how the swerve or fall of a horse, the blunder of a pointsman, a piece of false seamanship, carelessness in the shooting-field, and fifty other causes, may at any moment launch us into eternity. It is often said that if we could only realize how marvellously the human frame is constructed, we should be afraid to move for fear of injuring the fragile mechanism; and, certainly, if we took into too careful consideration the innumerable quagmires and pitfalls, the many unseen but possible perils to which we might fall victims as we go about in these modern times, we should be afraid to stir beyond the very thresholds of our houses.

Τὸ μὲν τελευτῆσαι, πάντων ἡ πεπρωμένη κατέκρινε, τὸ δὲ καλῶς ἀποθανεῖν ἴδιον τοῖς σπουδαίοις.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, we are all fated to die some time or other, but when Isocrates said so, he little foresaw how many new infernal machines would be invented to increase the chances; and as to an honourable death being reserved for the good man, matters may be somewhat anticipated by his being ignominiously crushed, drowned, or blown to atoms, any moment when he least expects it.

On the other side of that fatal wood a sad scene presented itself.

Close by a clump of evergreens stood a throng of

<sup>1</sup> Literally, Fate has ordained that every one must die, but an honourable death awaits the good.



anxious, terrified men, looking from each other in painful silence to the helpless form which lay stretched out at their feet. With bated breath directions were given and contradicted in the same moment, and all seemed transfixed by the sudden horror of the situation.

"More water—quick, quick! oh, my God! he is sinking!" cried Clement, choking with suppressed agony, as he tenderly supported the head of his dearly-loved friend, and pressed the silver flask again to those ashen lips. "Oh, *how* long will the doctor be?"

"Tewkesley and two of the men have gone for him; he must be here directly," said Sir Francis; "stand a little back there—give him more air."

This was no trifling accident it appeared, albeit Tewkesley, though he thought differently, had so represented it, but only with the best intentions.

There lay the form of poor Hector Grayle, lately so full of health and strength, now perfectly unconscious, and weltering in his blood, from a nasty wound in the left side, just above the hip. Every effort had been made to stanch the bleeding, and it was thought hazardous to move him until the doctor arrived; for directly they attempted to do so, the action seemed to aggravate the hemorrhage, so all that could be done was to wait patiently for medical assistance.

And who is that poor frantic creature stamping and wringing his hands like one demented, as he paces backwards and forwards aloof from the rest? Poor Colonel Gaskill! Even the knowledge that it was no fault of his does not serve to assuage one whit that awful agony of mind—the dreadful feeling of having shot a fellow-creature. But, as I have said, the blame did not rest with him, the accident having happened in this wise.

After Hector had posted his guns round the wood,

without assigning himself a place, he had gone to join the beaters with the intention of walking with them, but before he could reach them Rolfe had given the signal to begin; so, on second thoughts, Hector hurried back, and quickly picked out a place where he thought he could stand without interfering with others. Unfortunately he selected a spot where the wood bulged out a little, just behind a clump of evergreens which was immediately on the right of Gaskill, and rather to his rear. Before he had warned the colonel of his presence, an unlucky rabbit darted between them past the clump, and Gaskill, who never dreamt any one was there, took a snap shot, too high to be effective, when poor Hector received the greater part of the charge in his side—for, to add to the misfortune, he was stooping at the time, or he would probably have been only peppered about the gaiters. Hearing the sharp cry of pain, the astonished colonel instantly ran to the spot, and then, to his intense dismay, saw what had happened. His cries for help soon brought two or three more to the place; and so quickly was the catastrophe made known, that in less than three minutes after its occurrence the beat had been stopped, and the firing ceased.

"Make way there!" cried Heffernan, when he saw the Squire approaching. Whereupon the others drew back in respectful silence, as Mr. Grayle, with a faltering step, reached the scene of the disaster.

The pitiful sight that greeted the poor old man completely overpowered him for a few minutes, and clinging for support to the nearest arm, with blinding tears in his eyes, he gazed in speechless anguish on the prostrate figure. Then recovering from a momentary state of stupor, he moved forward, and sinking on his knees beside the unconscious form, took one hand in his, and looked long and earnestly into the deathlike face. At

length the power of speech came to the relief of the stricken heart—the pent up feelings, and in a broken voice that thrilled through every bystander, he cried out,—

“Hector, my darling boy, look at me. Oh, God! have mercy—have mercy on him, my boy, my beautiful boy.”

These touching words were followed by a long, deep silence, and the old man’s lips moved in prayer as his head sank down on his breast.

But suddenly, and to the astonishment of all, a marvellous change came over the apparently helpless figure thus bowed in abject grief; and all in a moment the Squire seemed to gather strength and fortitude. After carefully examining Hector’s heart and pulse he rose from his knees, and taking out a pocket-book, dashed off some rapidly written words on one of the leaves, which he tore out and folded. Then turning, he motioned to Heffernan, who stepped forward and eagerly asked,—

“Is there anything in the world I can do, Mr. Grayle?”

“Yes, yes; you can. Will you oblige me by taking this telegram to the village yourself, and see that it is sent off correctly and at once. I have summoned Doctor Seagull’s immediate attendance from town, but add any words you think proper to make it more urgent. There is not a moment to be lost. You’d better take the game-cart, if you don’t mind.”

“That’s gone for the doctor already, sir,” remarked Rolfe, touching his hat.

“Never mind, Mr. Grayle; I can get there nearly as quickly on foot,” replied Heffernan. “You may rely on me for using all despatch;” and he hurried from the spot.

"Now, Clement," said the Squire, presently, "let me take your place there, and pray go and look if you can see anything of Dr. Whittle, or his assistant."

Tenderly transferring the support of Hector's head to the grandfather's loving care, Clement rose from the ground to do as requested.

Shortly afterwards the welcome words "Here he comes! here comes the doctor!" passed from lip to lip; and as Clement caught sight of him and Tewkesley driving up in a dog-cart in mad haste, utterly regardless of the rough ground they had to pass over, he inwardly thanked God from the bottom of his heart.

Quick as thought Dr. Whittle, who was a young practitioner, but clever as he was active, jumped from the dog-cart, gave it in charge to one of the men, and ran towards the spot where Hector lay, carrying a box of surgical instruments, which made the Squire shudder when he saw it. At the same time Lizzie Rolfe appeared upon the scene, with her arms full of blankets and cushions, and these were quickly utilized for the comfort of the wounded man. At the sight of Hector's livid face, whom she believed at first to be dead, Lizzie recoiled in terror; and as she gave up the things she carried, a sensation of faintness seized her; but hearing that he still lived, she shook off the momentary feeling, and rendered what assistance lay in her power.

With rapid, skilful hands, Dr. Whittle proceeded to make an examination of the wound, speaking all the time in short, jerky sentences, though his touch was gentle as a woman's.

"Tut, tut! sad, very sad! how did it happen?" Then, without waiting for a reply, he continued, partly to himself and partly aloud, "Ah! I see; external hemorrhage; glad it's not the other. So long as we only bleed



a little outside, I don't mind; not nearly so bad as I thought. But this must be stopped. Can't do much here—cold air—damp ground—isn't there some house close by? Mustn't move him far, you understand."

"We might take him to your cottage, Rolfe?" suggested Tewkesley.

"To be sure, sir," said the gamekeeper; "my missus and Lizzie here would do all they could, *I* know."

"Yes, that will be best," observed Mr. Grayle, who had watched the doctor in anxious silence, and dreaded to ask if he thought there was any real danger.

"By the park gates there? Nothing could be better," said Dr. Whittle. "I think we can manage to move him so far, if we've got anything to carry him on."

"We've a hurdle here ready," exclaimed Clement.

"The very thing; and with these blankets and cushions we shall get on well; there's a rug in my cart, too; get that."

Thus they rapidly improvised a comfortable stretcher on which to carry the inanimate body.

"Poor lad!" muttered the doctor to himself while this was being done, and as he gently probed the wound; "no wonder he has fainted; lost a lot of blood. Several pellets to be extracted, I see, but nothing very serious. This will act as a styptic"—and he lost no time in applying a temporary gag of lint, &c., to the injured part, in order to check the flow of blood while he was being moved.

"There, he'll do now, I think, till we get indoors," he observed, replacing the coverings. "Now then, look sharp, some of you men. Gently how you lift him; that's the way. Mind! no jerking; just glide along as smoothly as possible."

Carefully following the doctor's instructions, the car-



rying party slowly and cautiously moved towards the keeper's lodge, while Gideon Rolfe and Lizzie hastened on in front to prepare for their coming.

"Now, you needn't be alarmed, Mr. Grayle," said the surgeon encouragingly, as they moved away together from the unlucky spot and followed the others. "It's not nearly so bad as I thought, I assure you. The bleeding once stopped, he will soon recover consciousness, and then we shall get on swimmingly."

"Oh! but do you really think so, Dr. Whittle?" asked Hector's grandfather anxiously, though immensely relieved at the other's words. "If there *is* real danger, pray don't conceal the truth from me. It would only be mistaken kindness to deceive me as to the worst, so please don't do it."

"Not I, sir," returned the doctor abruptly, rather nettled at being doubted. "I'm a plain-spoken man, and if I thought him in a bad way, I'd say so. Better call in another medical man as well, if you can't believe me."

"Nay, I do not doubt you for a moment, my dear sir," replied Mr. Grayle; "but I must tell you I had telegraphed to London for Dr. Seagull before you came up."

"That's all right, then—very glad to hear it; I shan't feel so much responsibility."

By this time the party had arrived at their destination; so the doctor hurried forward to superintend the shifting of his patient from the stretcher to a couch.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## "ILL NEWS TRAVELS APACE."

"Evil news rides post, while good news bates."—*Milton*.

HEFFERNAN never stopped running till he reached the telegraph office in the village, on the other side of the park, which he did in an incredibly short space of time, and forthwith sent off the following message:—

<p>"From          "Percy Grayle, Esq.,          "Barringtrees Park.</p>	<p>To          Dr. W. Seagull,          347, Park Street,          "London, W.</p>
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"Serious accident to my grandson—gunshot wound—left side—great loss of blood—imminent danger—come next train without fail."

"There, I should hope that will bring him," said Heffernan to himself, as he handed it in and urged its immediate despatch. "I don't think I can well put it stronger. By Jove!" he exclaimed, wiping his forehead as he left the office, "how awfully blown I am! London hours don't improve a man's wind;" and he leisurely retraced his steps through the village in order to recover himself.

"One doesn't like to think of it," he reflected, "but I'm afraid it's a case with poor young Grayle. I pity

those women and the old Squire; such an idol as they have made of the boy! And who is to break the news to his mother and sister? Heaven forbid I should! Good gracious! here comes Agnes, as I live!"

On re-entering the park he had of course to pass again by the Hall, and as he did so he saw Agnes hurrying towards him. It was at once apparent from her manner that she was much alarmed, and Heffernan felt he was in for the scene he so dreaded.

"Tell me, oh, pray tell me," she cried, on meeting him, "what *is* the matter? I saw you running across the park just now, and I *know* something has happened."

"Oh, you—you need not be alarmed, really, Miss Grayle. It is nothing I assure you—that is—" he stammered, wishing himself fifty miles away, "I had to— to rush off with a telegram on business—an important telegram, that's all."

"No, no," exclaimed Agnes, excitedly; "don't deceive me, Captain Heffernan. You cannot deceive me. There has been some accident, I know. Why did they stop the shooting like that? Why did they send us home directly? Oh, pray tell me the truth."

"Upon my word, Miss Grayle, I don't know how to answer you. You seem so positive that there *is* something wrong, and I—I cannot tell you a lie."

"I knew it; I was sure of it," she continued, turning paler. "And Lady Mountjoy knew it too. She could not conceal it from me."

"Lady Mountjoy's an idiot," muttered Heffernan.

"I dread to hear it—I know what is coming; but, oh, tell me the worst, Captain Heffernan. Is it my brother? Is it Hector?" She forced the question from her, and became more and more agitated.

"Now look here, Miss Grayle," he returned, firmly, but in a kind tone; "before I say another word you must make me a promise."

"Yes, yes; pray go on. Anything, only don't torture me."

"Well, I want you to return to the house immediately, but before you do so, pray calm yourself. Don't let the others know what has happened by your own agitation, if I tell you, or you will make matters ten times worse. Come, will you be brave?"

"Yes, indeed I will try," she gasped, her alarm increasing every moment.

"Then it is true that there has been a bit of an accident, and your brother has been struck by some—some stray shot—"

"Oh, Hector! my poor darling brother!" cried Agnes, shuddering when she heard it.

"Now pray don't be frightened. You promised to be brave, and we hope it is not at all serious; indeed we are sure it is not. You will hear all about how it happened presently. Meantime everything that is possible is being done. I have just telegraphed to London for the first surgeon, who will be down this evening, and if your brother can be moved, of course you will see him directly; but if not, I promise faithfully to return and tell you at once. Come now, Agnes," he added, taking her hand gently—this was the first time he had called her by her Christian name—"do bear up, and show how strong-minded you are. You know the old proverb, and believe me, ladies at the present juncture would be rather a hindrance than otherwise; excuse me for saying so."

"I will do as you wish, then," murmured Agnes, after a moment. "You say you do not think it is anything serious, really and truly?"

"I don't, indeed," he answered, adding to himself, "God forgive me if I deceive her."

"And you will promise to come for me as you say?"

"I promise;" and pressing his hand to show that she placed full confidence in him, Agnes, with a mind full of misgivings regarding the accident, turned slowly back towards the Hall."

"Poor girl!" thought Heffernan, looking after her, "it will be a hard struggle for her to keep *her* promise, I'm afraid, with all the love and anxiety at her heart. Thank goodness I got out of the matter so well. What a fool I was to run right in front of the windows!"

As he quickened his pace across the park he could hardly disguise from himself an inward conviction that when he again reached the wood he should hear that all was over, and his conscience seemed to reproach him for having behaved, perhaps, with too great caution in concealing the real truth from Agnes. Although he intended to act for the best, he knew she would never forgive him if a suspicion crossed her mind that he had wilfully deceived her, thereby very likely depriving her of the chance of being with her brother in his last moments. But dismissing such gloomy forebodings as these from his mind, he tried after a while to take a brighter view of things, and bethought him how such accidents had often happened without being attended by fatal results, especially where youth and health, as in this case, were in favour of the victim.

Hurrying along with his eyes on the ground, he did not observe two other figures walking for a time almost parallel with him, their path and his converging towards the same point; nor until he was close upon them did he look up, when a voice greeted him,—



"Why, bless me, it is Mr. Albert after all, Simon. I thought I couldn't be mistaken."

"Mrs. Corcoran!" exclaimed Heffernan, starting back in surprise, as he found himself confronted by that austere-looking female. "Why, what on earth brings *you* to this part of the world?"

"That's easy explained, sir," replied Mrs. Corcoran; "I'm staying with my brother, Mr. Sickles, you know, one of the tenants; and this is my nephew, Simon," she continued, introducing the shiny-faced youth, who made a grab at his hat by way of salute. "But, dear me, who ever would have thought of meeting *you* here, Mr. Albert? I *am* glad to see you again though, that's the truth," and the stern features relaxed into quite a softened expression as she said it.

"So am I glad to see you—very," replied Heffernan, hastily, shaking her by the hand. "I wonder you knew me; it's such an age since—"

"Lor, bless you!" exclaimed Mrs. Corcoran, "why, I even knew your voice again. Tell me, didn't you lose your way last night in a fly, and stop at a little house to ask the road?"

"To be sure I did, and was half an hour late for dinner in consequence."

"There! I could have sworn it was you; and I was having supper at that very house. You know them, then?" she added, nodding towards the Hall. "Are you going to stay here long?"

"Not very, I fancy. At least I've only just come for the shooting. But I tell you what, we must have a talk over old times by-and-by. I really can't stop now," and he prepared to move off again. "By the way, have you heard of the accident?"

"To poor Mr. Hector, sir? Yes, that we have,"

chimed in Simon. "They've taken him to the Kipper's Lodge, I b'lieve; so we was just a goin' to arsk arter him."

"Then our ways lie together," observed Heffernan, as they walked on. "They've moved him already, have they?"

"Yes, Mr. Albert. Listwayes so I heerd 'em saye," replied Simon.

"You mustn't call this gentleman by his Christian name, Simon," remarked Mrs. Corcoran, reprovingly; "that's only *my* privilege as his old nurse, is it, sir? Captain Denby, that's his proper title, mind."

"No, there you are wrong, Mrs. Corcoran. You forget—I've been rechristened," said Heffernan.

"Ah, to be sure. I did forget for the minute."

"Rechristened from a golden font, as one may say," he continued, with a smile.

"Why, dear me," cried Simon, in open-mouthed astonishment, "du they have gould things for Christnuns in yar chu'ches, sir?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Heffernan. "What delicious simplicity! I spoke figuratively, my good fellow—came in for some money, you know; so changed my name."

This sort of thing being beyond the yahoo's comprehension, he merely drawled out "Ooh, ar!" as if he knew all about it, and fell to thinking of that font, and how he would like to have it melted down.

"But what is it now, Mr. Albert?" inquired Mrs. Corcoran. "Of course I've heard, but I forget."

"Heffernan," he replied, spelling it; "H-E-F-F-E-R-N-A-N—Albert Denby Heffernan. But I've dropped the Denby altogether, you understand; so please don't forget that." Here he gave Mrs. Corcoran a significant look, of which she appeared to take no notice.

Discussing the unfortunate accident as they walked along, the High Lodge was soon reached, when the doctor's dog-cart standing outside at once corroborated Simon's statement that Hector had been taken there.

It was market-day at the little town close by, and some of the farmers on their return home, having to pass by the park gates, had heard the sooner of the sad catastrophe, and so helped to spread the news.

"Here, Mrs. Cole! here's old Sickles," called Grumpy Grayle from his sanctum, as he saw the farmer drive up to Crutch Hut; "get a glass of hot grog ready, he'll be cold—I'll go to the door," and as he spoke he hobbled out to receive his visitor.

"Come in, Sickles, come in and have a warm," cried he, as he opened the front door; "here, Mary! Polly! look sharp and hold this horse."

"No, thank ye, Mr. Grile," said the farmer, "I 'on't come in nayow; I only just stopped to tell ye the news. You hain't heerd it yit, I'll lie a guinea."

"News! what news?"

"Shockun news—shockun, shockun," and the farmer shook his old head sadly, the full moon seeming to be quite eclipsed by a heavy cloud; "what du you think? they ha' bin an' shot poor Mr. Hector."

"Shot—who?" cried Andrew, in astonishment.

"Ah, there you want to 'now more'n I can tell ye—never heerd *who* shot 'um, poor young man."

"But do you mean to tell me that Mr. Hector is actually—?"

"Shot—yis, that I *du*."

"Dead!" screamed Grumpy, in an excited falsetto.

"Dead as a nit—they tould me."

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Grumpy, really shocked; "but how? when?"

"This very arternoon in them coveys by the High Woods, they was a takin' him to ould Rolfe's lodge as I druv past."

"Tut, tut, this is dreadful, 'pon my soul! I must go and ask about it directly. Are you sure they weren't going on to the Hall?"

"No, no, they dassn't move the body there till arter dark, I don't s'pose, 'cos o' the laidies, poor things—'t'sint loikely. I'll just drink this," said the farmer, taking a stiff beaker of hot brandy and water from the housekeeper, "and drive you up to the Lodge myself, if ye loike. Thank you, Mrs. Cole, here's to you, Mr. Grile," and he sucked down the grog at a draught, followed by a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Very well, you may do that, Sickles, and I'll go with you at once. Just get my great coat, hat, and stick, Mrs. Cole," added the old bachelor, and in another three minutes they were on their way.

Grumpy Grayle never spoke a word as they drove along, and although the farmer of course knew of the deadly feud between Andrew and the family at the Hall, he made a few feeble attempts at condoling with him on the sudden calamity; but Grumpy's mind was too fully occupied with conflicting emotions to pay much attention to Mr. Sickles' remarks, though what those emotions were it would not be easy to describe.

*Heredis fletus sub personâ risus est*, as the Latin writer facetiously puts it; but a man must indeed be utterly lost to every sense of humanity, a morbid and degraded wretch, who could gloat over thoughts of his own aggrandizement at the very moment when the awfully sudden death of one of his own flesh and blood brings him nearer to the goal; and to do Andrew Grayle justice, selfish cynic though he was, he was not so bad as this. The



first impulse of his mind was one of real grief and horror at the fearful accident and its consequence. This for some time held possession of his thoughts, giving way in turn to a tumult of wild calculations and castles in the air, which tumbled over one another through his mind as though they were playing at leap-frog, and literally seemed to set his brain on fire. Then again came the revulsion of feeling as they neared the Lodge, where he supposed lay the dead body of poor Hector; when he inwardly cursed himself and his fiendish meditations, and turned his thoughts once more into the healthier and more natural channel of remorse and heart-felt sorrow.

But Hector Grayle was not dead, very far from it—or what would become of my story?—and when Grumpy ascertained this point on their arrival at the park gates, yet another revulsion of feeling set in; and before he had time to stop them, he found his unruly thoughts playing at that infernal game of leap-frog once more, jumping to conclusions, and quick as lightning turning over calculations as to the chances for and against the boy's recovery—in short, behaving altogether in such an unseemly fashion, as to make him shake his head impatiently by way of warning them to stop their little game, and let him think quietly. Then when he learnt on further inquiry that the accident, as Dr. Whittle had assured the Squire, was not so serious as at first supposed, and that they hoped to move Hector to the Hall in the morning, he turned on his heel, and hurrying back to Farmer Sickles, blurted out angrily in his highest falsetto,—

“What the devil did you go and tell me he was dead for, you infernal old fool?” but remembering himself suddenly, he continued in a milder tone, “frightening a fellow like that—but thank you for your lift, Sickles, all the same, I’ll walk back—I’ll walk back; good night.”



Then, without waiting for an answer, he disappeared into the darkening twilight, and took a short cut across the park towards Crutch Hut.

Setting aside all interested feelings on the subject, Grumpy Grayle, when he heard that Hector's accident had been so exaggerated, no doubt experienced that extraordinary sensation of disappointment which may not be entirely foreign to a good many people—although very few would care to own it, I expect—a sort of fiendish regret which intrudes itself on the mind when some fearful catastrophe is either contradicted or minimized.

What is it? who can explain such a diabolical impulse? It must be the innate viciousness in human nature which forces itself to the surface, and usurps, for the moment, the place of man's better instincts—that same irresistible power that governs some people when they announce a sudden death or dire calamity, and prompts them to do so with a twitching smile which they are utterly unable to repress, and which makes them almost feel, perhaps, as if possessed of an evil spirit.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE KEEPER'S LODGE.

"O woman ! in our hours of ease,  
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,  
And variable as the shade  
By the light quivering aspen made;  
When pain and anguish wring the brow,  
A ministering angel thou !"

*Sir Walter Scott.*

HAVING left Hector Grayle in such a "parlous state," it is incumbent on me to explain at once how matters went with him ; albeit for the purposes of this narrative there is no necessity to enter into minute details with regard to his illness and subsequent recovery.

The London surgeon arrived that evening about nine o'clock, and, after a careful examination of the wound, endorsed Dr. Whittle's opinion that it was not of a dangerous nature ; though it appeared worse than it really was, to the uninitiated, from the great efflux of blood. This was soon stanchd, however, and the shot extracted. Luckily the force of the charge had been somewhat broken in passing through the clump of evergreens, or it might have been a great deal worse.

Hector recovered consciousness soon after reaching the Lodge ; and the next day Dr. Whittle wanted to have him removed to the Hall at once, as he had promised the Squire. But this Dr. Seagull opposed, saying he thought

it advisable for him to remain quiet for a few days where he was, which he accordingly did. Since it was ascertained that there was no cause to be apprehensive of any real danger, his mother was at once informed of the accident; and she and Agnes (the latter having been in a state of feverish anxiety since her interview with Hefferman) repaired to the Lodge to take care of him. Their office, however, was rendered almost a sinecure from the tender care and attention which Mrs. Rolfe and her daughter bestowed upon the patient; and, with the help of certain articles from the Hall, they contrived to make him quite as comfortable as if he had been in his own home. Finding this to be the case, and that Hector progressed as favourably as possible, his mother and sister felt less necessity for their being in constant attendance on him at the cottage. They stayed with him for the first night, however, and the greater part of each day following until he was removed, but left him in the evenings with perfect confidence to the care of Mrs. Rolfe and Lizzie; for the gamekeeper's wife proved herself quite an adept in the art of nursing—such, in fact, having been her vocation before she married.

There was one thing, however, regarding her patient about which Mrs. Rolfe did not exercise sufficient discrimination—one luxury which she permitted him to indulge in far too much—namely, the companionship of her handsome daughter, no doubt having perfect faith in the girl's discretion. Hence it came about that Hector and Lizzie were constantly alone together in the evenings, after his mother and Agnes returned to the Hall; and then, as a matter of course, followed the old, old story. But, though both owned to themselves afterwards—

“The still throb—the secret start—  
The hidden impulse of the heart”—

neither at first appeared to realize the condition into which they were rapidly drifting, nor the insinuating influence of that naughty little cherub with the quiver and bow.

Now such a situation for hero and heroine cannot, I am afraid, boast of much novelty ; but similar circumstances often lead to widely different results, and in this case the promising romance led to a delightful complication of affairs. Indeed, could Gertrude only have foreseen the sequel, she would never have left her darling boy day or night till he was safely at home again.

The little apartment which had been dedicated to Hector's use was an inner sitting-room of the Lodge, and anything more delightfully cosy than this had been made by women's loving hands could scarcely be imagined ; chiefly owing, of course, to the importations from the Hall ; for, though his detention in the keeper's cottage would be but for a short while, his mother was determined to make it as little irksome to him as possible. Poor Gertrude ! she might have spared herself a great deal of trouble. There was not much fear of Hector suffering from *ennui* so long as he remained where he was. But when the time came for him to be removed to his own home, he didn't seem to relish the idea at all, notwithstanding that for the first day or so he had been anxious for that very removal. On the other hand, Lizzie almost regretted that he had improved so rapidly under their care, and felt quite a blank in her existence when they took him away. But all such foolish weaknesses as these they discreetly kept to themselves for the present, carefully locked away in the innermost recesses of their hearts.

Taking a peep one evening at Hector Grayle in this little elysium, you would find him propped up by pillows

on a snug couch, which had been drawn nearer to the cheerful fire than usual that night, for the thermometer registered several degrees of frost. By his side was a table, on which stood a reading-lamp, with a shade over it, to keep the strong light from his eyes; and seated near the table was Lizzie, apparently busily engaged with some worsted work.

A very pretty picture, reader; quite as romantic intrinsically as it appeared at a first glance.

They were alone, as usual; and it would be difficult to say which was the more striking figure of the two—Hector, as he lay there with his handsome face slightly flushed from the warmth of the room, looking very delicate and interesting in his invalid garb; or Lizzie, the sweet “ministering angel” seated by him, in the bloom of health and the first dawn of womanly beauty, a soft blush now and again stealing over her cheek as she thought of the novelty of the situation.

“Come, little nurse,” observed Hector, after a longer silence than usual, “don’t wrap yourself up altogether in that worsted. Talk to me a bit now, will you? I like to hear your voice.”

“But you know the doctor’s orders, Mr. Hector—” began Lizzie.

“Oh, never mind the doctor. I feel much better to-night, and I’m sure a chat with you can’t do me any harm.”

“Perhaps you would like me to read you something?” she said, preparing to put away her work.

“Presently you shall, if you will; but I prefer talking just now. Do you know, Lizzie,” he continued, after a short pause, “I’m improving so, I’m—I’m afraid they’ll move me directly,” and he suppressed a sigh as he said this.



"Afraid!" she exclaimed, looking up in surprise; "but don't you want to be moved, Mr. Hector?"

"Really, I don't know. I don't quite think I do. I've grown so fond of this dear little room during the last few days that I—I shall be quite sorry to leave it." He spoke in a dreamy manner, as if something more than the room occupied his thoughts.

"But think how comfortable you will feel at home again, sir. Of course we have done our best to make you so here; but, after all, there's no place like home."

"Perhaps not. Ah, Lizzie," cried Hector, earnestly, "I'm indeed most grateful for all the care you have taken of me—you and your good mother."

"We haven't done much, I'm afraid, Mr. Hector; it wasn't in our power. You have to thank Mrs. Grayle and Miss Agnes for providing every comfort."

"That may be; still it does not detract from all your gentle kindness, your devoted attention; and I shall never forget it, Lizzie, never."

Then followed another pause, during which Lizzie Rolfe worked away very diligently, and never looked up at all; while Hector watched her with a strange light in his blue eyes, which might have made her heart beat faster had she met his gaze at that moment.

"And were you frightened about me?" he inquired, presently. "Did you think I was really going to die?"

"I was frightened at first, very," she replied, "until both the doctors said there was no danger; and then I—I—" she hesitated.

"What, Lizzie?"

"I knelt down and thanked God."

"Yes? And so you would have cared a little? You would have been very sorry if I had died, would you

not?" He asked this still gazing at her with the same look, and seemed to delight in prolonging the subject.

"Oh, yes; indeed—indeed I should," she answered, simply; afterwards blushing at having spoken so earnestly, and adding quickly, "What a strange question, sir. Of course I should—of any one."

As she thus suddenly checked herself, a slight smile, partly of amusement, partly of gratification, played about his lips for a minute, and when next he spoke it was in an altered tone.

"Do you know, little nurse," said he, "there is something about you that interests me immensely. It seems to me as if you were more fitted to be a queen amongst people than—than living quietly here in a humble cottage. I don't want to turn your pretty head by saying such things, but—"

"Perhaps you *will* turn my head if you do, sir," she interrupted, with just a shade of annoyance in her tone. "I am sure you don't mean to vex me by talking nonsense; but I like you much better when you speak sensibly to me."

"Very well; very well, then," he rejoined, demurely. "I beg your pardon."

"I didn't mean to be rude, Mr. Hector, when I said talking nonsense, you understand; I only meant—"

"I understand you, Lizzie; that you don't want me to think you an empty-headed little fool, like most of the pretty girls about, all conceit and flippancy. Nor do I, I can tell you. And now you shall read to me, if you don't mind."

"Very well, sir, I will directly; for I really must not let you talk any more. But it's your time for taking something now," she added, looking at the clock on the

mantlepiece, and rising. "I must go and get that first;" and Lizzie left the room.

"I do hope she didn't think I meant to play the fool and chaff her," thought Hector, in his solitude. "Far from it, if she only knew. I never felt less inclined to chaff in my life." And I don't believe he did. Still, allowances must be made for the situation. We all know that the susceptibilities of the mind are far keener when the human frame has been weakened by a sudden and dangerous illness; and what a violent vapour-bath is to the body, the ordeal of a sick-bed is to the mental faculty, in that each becomes more sensitive to extraneous influences.

Now if any one had told Hector Grayle that he was falling in love with the gamekeeper's daughter, he would, no doubt, have ridiculed the idea; but when he came to ask himself the question seriously, he felt the possibility of such a thing was not to be treated quite so lightly. Nor could he otherwise account for the sudden and powerful interest he took in this girl, apart from his gratitude for her gentle nursing; so, being only one-and-twenty, you see, and an interesting invalid into the bargain, he gave way to the soft influence, and allowing his thoughts to have full sway, indulged in such a chaos of romantic meditations as might have induced him then and there to declare himself, had Lizzie come into the room at that moment instead of her father.

"Good evening, Mr. Hector," said the keeper, as he entered, having tapped twice without attracting notice, so deep in thought was his young master; "I'm glad to hear you're better, sir."

"Getting on splendidly, Rolfe, thank you," said Hector, wishing the old man at Jericho for having disturbed his pleasant reverie. "I shall soon be well enough for another turn at the coverts."

"That's right, sir, I hope you will. There's plenty more wants shootin', I can tell you."

"You mean game, I suppose, not people," remarked Hector, smiling. "By George! they very nearly added me to the bag that day, didn't they?"

"Don't talk of it, sir. It was nearly being no laughing matter," observed Rolfe; "however, thank God it was no worse. But do you know, Mr. Hector, I was almost as sorry for that gentleman as I was for you."

"You mean Colonel Gaskill; yes, poor fellow; I hear he has taken it awfully to heart, and declares he'll never handle a gun again as long as he lives. But that's all nonsense, isn't it, Rolfe? I shall ask him to join us again the first opportunity."

"I would, sir, for it was no fault of his, nor any one else's for that matter. Lor! what a shock it gave us all, to be sure, Mr. Hector; I thought my missus was like to have highstrikes when she seed you, and she's a strong 'un in a general way. Then somehow the report got about at first that you was a-dying, and then that you was dead, and I don't b'lieve there was a soul, tenant or servant, on the place, but what sat down to supper that night with more heartache than appetite."

"Ah, well, it's pleasant to feel that people take so kind an interest in one."

"That's true, sir, but it's no more than you might expect'."

Now Montaigne says, "*Peu d'hommes ont esté admirez par leurs domestiques*;" from which, no doubt, Madame Cornuel borrowed the idea that no man is a hero to his valet; but Hector Grayle was certainly an exception, and just one of those few who *was* both admired and beloved by everybody, from the butler to the lowest menial; and he had so endeared himself to all around him,

that no wonder universal grief and consternation prevailed at Barringtrees when the accident occurred.

"I said no one was to blame," continued the keeper; "but if any one was, it was me, sir, for startin' the beaters afore you was ready."

"Not a bit of it, Rolfe; pray don't think of such a thing."

"I know I was wonderful cut up afterwards, sir, when I *did* come to think of it."

Here their conversation was interrupted by Mrs. Rolfe, who entered the room, saying,—

"Look here, Gideon, I told you you might come and see Mr. Hector, if you wouldn't let him talk, and *I've* heard you both. The young gentleman *must* be kept quiet, so just you say good night, and be off."

At which reproof old Gideon meekly obeyed his better half, and left the room again.

"Now, sir," continued Mrs. Rolfe, handing Hector a cup of beef tea, "it's time you took this, and went to sleep."

"But Lizzie's going to read to me a little first," he remonstrated.

"No, sir, not this evening," replied the keeper's wife, firmly; "you're quite flushed and excited as it is; we shall be throwing you back if we don't mind the doctor; besides, Lizzie looked tired herself, and I've made her go to bed. Time all good folks was there now; come, sir," and with dexterous hands she rearranged his pillows; then taking a seat by the fire, waited till he had finished his refreshment.

Hector knew it was useless to dispute the authority of the experienced nurse; so, with a slight feeling of disappointment at being done out of the reading, he sipped at his beef tea without speaking.



This light repast seemed to be soporific in its effect, and with the dead silence surging in his ears and soothing the mind somewhat overtaxed by recent musings, Hector soon fell into a deep sleep with the cup in his hand.

Mrs. Rolfe, perceiving this, stole gently to the bedside, and taking it from his unconscious grasp, arranged the coverings and made the room up for the night.

So, calm repose and pleasant dreams to you, Hector Grayle; and may the vision of that sweet face, which haunts your feverish pillow, create only in your mind pure and noble thoughts, and make you worthy of the name you bear, and the pride of your ancestral home.

“ ’Tis not high power that makes a place divine,  
Nor that the men from gods derive their line;  
But sacred thoughts in holy bosoms stored  
Make people noble, and the place adored.”

## CHAPTER X.

## THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD.

"Non bene conducti vendunt perjuria testes."—*Ovid.*

SOME five or six weeks after the events related, Mrs. Corcoran was returning one morning from a visit to High Lodge, having lately struck up an acquaintance with the Rolfes which appeared to be interesting to her, and agreeable to all parties.

The woman was apparently wrapped in deep thought as she walked along, and seemed not to hear the footsteps which had been overtaking her for the last hundred yards, until suddenly aroused from her reverie by her nephew exclaiming,—

"Hold hard, aunt; you ha' no need to walk, I've brought the pony chaise for you."

"What made you do that? did you think I was afraid of the deer running at me?"

"No, I don't suppose you are," replied Simon; "though they du saye that ain't oover saife since the Squire put them Scotch beggars into the park; but, the fact is, the Cap'en is waiting at our house to see you."

"Captain Heffernan! Has he returned, then?"

"Yes, jist come down from Lunnon, and he said he wanted to speak to you rather partic'ler afore he went on

up to the Hall, so arsked me if I'd mind a-comin' to fetch ye *di-rec'ly*."

"Aha!" muttered Mrs. Corcoran to herself, "I thought I should jog his memory. He'll not forget his old nurse again in a hurry, I'll warrant."

Thereupon she turned back with her nephew, and they drove home together in the rickety old rattle-trap, yclept a pony-chaise.

Captain Heffernan, who was on leave from Aldershot, where his regiment was then stationed, returned to town a few days after the accident. But in that short space of time he had made considerable progress in his suit with Agnes—had proposed and been accepted, and had so far ingratiated himself with all, that the engagement was sanctioned and approved both by Gertrude and the Squire; old Mrs. Grayle not being consulted, from the well understood fact that it was an impossibility for her to entertain an unprejudiced opinion of any one.

Gertrude deprecated the idea of marriage for at least a year, on the plea of her daughter's extreme youth; for, acting like a sensible and anxious mother, she wished to give them a certain time in which to study each other's characters before the irrevocable step was taken.

Heffernan chafed considerably at such delay, for he was deeply in love with Agnes; but since Gertrude made the postponement a *sine quâ non*, and in this was supported by the Squire, he had no alternative but to submit with a good grace. The recognized *fiancé* of Agnes Grayle, however, was now a privileged visitor at Barringtrees Park whenever he chose to avail himself of the prerogative, and, as Simon intimated to Mrs. Corcoran, the "Cap'en" had just come down from town on one of his flying visits, though I am bound to confess it was not this time solely on the wings of love.

Mrs. Corcoran spoke truly when she said Captain Heffernan had "gone the pace;" but he had nearly run himself out at last, and had pulled up into a walk, literally and figuratively; having, within the last few years, found it expedient to exchange from a crack cavalry regiment into the 126th Foot. No man had had better chances than Heffernan, and no man had availed himself of them less advisably. In addition to living at a rapid rate in other ways, he had succeeded in making a large hole in a small fortune by means of two special weaknesses—the Turf and the Stock Exchange; but, although a shrewd man regarding horseflesh, his speculations in the City were often of the wildest nature; and as the fickle goddess seldom turned up trumps for him in either branch of gambling, he began to think about putting on the brake. Taking things in time, therefore, since he saw there could be only one issue when everything was going out and nothing coming in, he advertised for an exchange, put his chargers up at Tattersall's (he kept no racers himself), and came down in the world, so to say, from horse to foot. This judicious step completed, he took stock of the resources left him, and found that, out of the general wreck, and after paying all debts, he started afresh, as a linesman, with something under five hundred a year, besides his pay. His brother officers in the Lancers were sorry to lose him, for he was popular in his regiment, being a genial companion, a promoter of sport, and generous to a fault. Popularity, however, is often rather an expensive article, and having found it so, Heffernan, when he joined the 126th, turned over a new leaf and drew in his horns, resolved to be taken more on his personal merits than the merits of his purse—at all events, by the men in his new regiment.

But an officer in the service, with considerable inde-

pendent means, generally gets the reputation of being a much richer man than he really is; consequently, Heffernan was looked upon in the matrimonial market, where he put himself up for sale, as *un bon parti*.

Starting under these auspices, he naturally hoped to secure a wife who could meet him halfway with a respectable dowry, and thus recoup himself for past extravagances. On making the acquaintance of the Grayles in London, he saw at once in Agnes the very girl to suit him—a handsome, accomplished young lady, with the certainty of a liberal marriage portion; and a girl, moreover, who soon exacted the utmost homage of his heart. When the subject of settlements was brought under discussion, the Squire of course was a little disappointed to find that Heffernan was not quite the millionaire he had been led to suppose; but since he had secured Agnes' affections, and quite taken her mother and himself by storm with his *bonhomie* and fascinating manners, the engagement, as I have said, was duly ratified.

*“Protinus ad censum, de moribus ultima fiet  
Quæstio”*—

In this case, however, the question as to the morals was the first consideration. At all events, it was so with Gertrude, who was no mercenary mother, and was far more solicitous for her daughter's happiness than for mere empty riches. With regard to Albert Heffernan's family there was little to be learnt, except that he was the son of a deceased clergyman, and had no near relatives alive; but though not exactly a scion of an ancient house, there was nothing against either him or his antecedents; indeed, his good qualities were loudly extolled by all who knew him. Having heard, therefore, nothing but what was favourable of him from all sides,



and fancying herself, moreover, an excellent judge of character, Gertrude felt every confidence in entrusting Agnes' future to his care; nevertheless, she could not be induced to forego that year's probation for which she so expressly stipulated; her own bitter experience, doubtless, dictating the precaution.

On reaching home, Mrs. Corcoran found Heffernan waiting for her in the little parlour of her brother's house, where he had been kicking his heels impatiently for the last half-hour.

"Why, Mr. Albert," she exclaimed, on entering the room, "I didn't expect to see you down again so soon."

"Didn't you? Well, your letter would have brought me if nothing else did, Hannah," he replied—he had taken to calling her by her Christian name again, as in the days of his youth—"but I preferred having a talk with you to scribbling letters—on a matter of this kind."

"Quite right; showing your good sense as you always do," observed the woman, leisurely removing her bonnet and shawl, and placing them on the sofa beside her. "You refer, I suppose, to the subject I hinted at in that letter?"

"Of course; what else should I refer to? We're not likely to be interrupted, are we?" he said, approaching the door, opening it cautiously, and looking out; "no eavesdroppers, eh?" and he closed it again.

"Don't be alarmed; you won't find any sneaks here, Mr. Albert," she remarked, smiling at his apprehension; "besides, they know you and me have got some little private business together."

"That's all right then. Now tell me," he continued, returning to the fireplace and standing with his back to it; "you say you have made a discovery?"

"I have. An important one, too—for you as well as me."

"Um—what you said in your letter was certainly emphatic; but how can you be so positive, my dear Hannah? One might easily be mistaken, you know—"

"Not I," returned Mrs. Corcoran, rather abruptly; "I'm not a fool, and I've got proof clear enough for anyone."

"Well, I grant you the coincidence is extraordinary, very extraordinary," remarked Heffernan, in a reflective manner; "but it may only be a coincidence after all, thereby misleading you and—"

"Very well, just as you please," she interrupted, testily; "believe it or not as you like; it don't much matter now."

"No, I suppose not, after all these years," said he, still musing.

And then followed a longer pause, during which both seemed to be occupied with their own thoughts.

Presently Heffernan stirred the fire, lighting up the dark room with a merry blaze, and then, as if catching its infection, resumed, in a more easy tone,—

"Well, Hannah, it's of no use our bothering our heads with suspicions, coincidences, and that sort of thing, is it? which, after all, may only turn out to be pure imagination, you know—"

"My dear man, what ever is the use of your talking like that? I tell you I've heard enough, and seen enough lately to convince fifty unbelieving Jews; enough to make one take one's Bible oath to it, if it was the last breath one ever drew. Do you think I can't remember about the clothes, and the linen, and the marking, and—"

"All right, all right," he interposed, hurriedly;

"that'll do, Hannah; it's of no use raking up all the affair again. Grant your suspicion to be correct, then, what do you advise me to do?"

"Do! do nothing at all, of course, except hold your tongue. You're safe enough; what more do you want? forget about it."

"I will; but I'll tell you what I can't forget, Hannah, and that is your true friendship—your staunch loyalty to me all these years."

"Lor, Mr. Albert, never mention it," exclaimed the woman, adding under her breath, "besides, it's a duty I owe to myself as well as you."

"But what made you write to me about it, Hannah? Letters are such devilish dangerous things, you know."

"To tell the truth, I never gave that a thought. I was anxious to warn you directly for one particular reason; else perhaps I should never have bothered you about the matter at all."

"What particular reason?"

"Well, if you'll take my advice, you won't let those old Frosts slip out of your mind. They're old folks, it's true, but they've got memories and tongues as well as other people; and it was only a couple of months ago, when I was down there, that they were grumbling because they hadn't heard from you lately." Mrs. Corcoran nodded her head significantly as she threw out these oblique hints.

"Confound it!" he cried, "what an infernal fool I am! I'm always forgetting to forward their remittance."

"Well, I wouldn't if I were you," observed she, dryly, "especially now."

"Thank you for the hint; I won't. But, Hannah," he continued, after a moment, "don't be offended at what I'm going to say, and think I want to put you on the

same footing with those old people, but I do wish you wouldn't be so independent, you know; you never by any chance ask me now for—"

"Bless your heart!" exclaimed Mrs. Corcoran, cutting him short, "*I'm* all right, never you fear; *I'm* taken care of; but still, if you like, you might now and then include me in your generosity *without* the asking, there!" and she gave him a peculiar look out of those dark eyes of hers which he did not quite know how to interpret, whether as a gentle reproach for past forgetfulness, or only as an off-hand acceptance of future favours.

"Of course I will—certainly I will—only too glad," said he, quickly.

At this juncture the door opened, and the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Sickles, who thought they had given them long enough, cut short this mysterious colloquy.

The old couple had introduced themselves to Captain Heffernan already, and the farmer now attacked him in a jovial twang with—

"Sit dayown, pry sit dayown, Cap'en; don't let us disturb yer. Very glad to see yer, *I'm* sure."

Sickles was quite proud of the apparent intimacy between his sister and this "swell officer," as Simon called him; and Mrs. Sickles felt "all of a fluster" at having to play hostess to so distinguished a visitor.

"'On't ye have a glass o' sherry white woine, and a mite o' currant caike, Cap'en, afore yer goo?" inquired the good soul in an anxious tone, and moving towards the sideboard.

Heffernan declined the tempting offer, however, with many thanks, though he was hard pressed by old Sickles, who didn't want to let him off so soon, and substituted hot grog and a pickwick, by way of greater temptation.

But at last he was permitted to take his departure ; and, jumping into the fly, which stood waiting patiently for him, he drove off to the Hall in a very moody frame of mind, and scarcely like a love-sick Leander hying to his Hero.



## CHAPTER XI.

## BRINGING IN THE NEW YEAR.

"The music, and the banquet, and the wine—  
 The garlands, the rose-odours, and the flowers—  
 The sparkling eyes, and flashing ornaments—

\* \* \* \* \*

The many twinkling feet so small and sylph-like,  
 Suggesting the more secret symmetry  
 Of the fair forms which terminate so well—  
 All the delusion of the dizzy scene,  
 Its false and true enchantments—Art and Nature."

*Byron.*

It was just after Christmas when Heffernan paid this visit to Barringtrees Park; and, on entering the house, it struck him that all the garden shrubs and plants had been brought inside to protect them from the cold.

The entrance hall had evidently been converted into a conservatory in honour of the season; flowers, ferns, exotics, and evergreens met the eye in all directions; evergreens in festoons, circles, triangles, and various designs, literally smothered the place; in fact, scarcely anything else was to be seen. From the stags' heads upon the walls, it appeared as if Birnam Wood had been brought to Barringtrees instead of Dunsinane, their stately horns being all concealed by leafy branches. The ancestors, too, in their frames were transformed into so

many owls in ivy-bushes, and some imaginary gentlemen, in suits of armour, were brought into requisition as convenient pegs whereon to hang ideas of the same decorative nature; in short, with it all, the place seemed to be suffering from a severe green epidemic, breaking out into red and white spots here and there, where the holly and mistletoe predominated.

The old Hall at Barringtrees was a very different residence now from the dull, ghostly mansion of former years—for the genial presence of young people in a house will always make itself felt—and though the gloomy aspect of its exterior could not well be changed, without painting, decorating, and otherwise modernizing it, which the Squire would not hear of, the dismal outside was amply compensated for by the cheery welcome within its hospitable doors, especially at Yule-tide and other festive occasions.

The drive being short from Farmer Sickles' house, Heffernan had scarcely recovered his wonted good-humour when the cab pulled up, and a heavy frown appeared to have fixed itself indelibly on his brow. He arrived just at that important kettledrum hour, five o'clock; and, as the butler opened the front door, the footman was seen crossing the hall to the drawing-room with the indispensable tea-tray. Now this meant the ladies being collected together in full force, and Heffernan, in his present frame of mind, hardly felt equal to face such a bevy. Asking to be shown to his room, therefore, he explained that he wished to unpack some fancy costumes he had brought down from London, and went upstairs.

The new year was to be inaugurated at Barringtrees by a fancy ball (also in celebration of Hector's coming of age); and, from the first *costumier* in town, Heffernan had procured some beautiful dresses, on commission, for

Agnes and others in the house, and a very handsome investment in which he meant to appear himself.

After leisurely unpacking and loitering about for some time, he at length descended the stairs, and took the opportunity of slipping off to the billiard-room, where he heard the click of the billiard balls. There he found Hector and Tewkesley in the middle of "a hundred up."

Hector had been off the sick-list for several days, but he still looked a good deal pulled down by his recent accident; and the slight over-exertion at Christmas time, in helping the Squire to do the honours at Barringtrees, had, perhaps, somewhat retarded his recovery. Heffernan had not seen him out of bed since his illness, and the change in his appearance at once struck him. He might have exclaimed with Æneas, when the ghost of the Trojan Hector appeared, "*Quantum mutatus ab illo.*" But, not wishing to alarm the Barringtrees Hector, Heffernan, instead, merely congratulated him heartily on his recovery, and the attainment of his twenty-first birthday.

"We shall finish this in a minute," said Hector, making a losing hazard off the red, "and then we'll go into the drawing-room. You've not seen the ladies yet, you say?"

"No; I've only just arrived."

"Brought all the dresses, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, everything complete."

"What are you coming out as yourself, Heffernan?" inquired Tewkesley.

"The evil genius in 'Faust.'"

"Mephistopheles; capital!" cried Hector. "Lady Mountjoy will be getting you to rejuvenate her 'dear Sir Francis' on the spot, I shouldn't wonder."

"Not she. Her ladyship prefers the old gentleman as he is. He makes such an excellent foil, you see."

"There's something in that, certainly. What's the game, Tewkesley? Did you put me on that loser?"

"Yes. Eighty-eight, seventy-nine." Here Hector, making a break, ran out a winner by twenty-one points.

He and Heffernan then adjourned to the drawing-room, while Tewkesley returned to the Rectory. To account for that gentleman's frequent presence at the Hall, it should be mentioned that, on the living at Barrington falling vacant two years since, the Squire, in whose gift the benefice was, had presented Gertrude's only brother, the Rev. Arthur Tewkesley, who was then a curate in some out-of-the-way place in Cornwall, and as he was a capital fellow, and proved a great acquisition to the parish, the Squire had no reason to regret the nomination.

Later on in the evening Heffernan had shaken off his blue devils for a time, and dismissed the mysterious burden from his mind which had grown out of his interview with Mrs. Corcoran. He took Agnes in to dinner, and she did not fail to notice that he was rather *distract* in his manner and conversation at first; but this wore off by degrees, and when they all reassembled in the drawing-room he had recovered his usual cheerful demeanour, so she thought no more of it.

Now came the all-important discussion regarding the fancy costumes from London, which were brought down from Heffernan's room into the library, submitted for inspection, and pronounced perfect. Of course each lady and gentleman desired to keep her or his dress a profound secret; but, as is usual in such cases, this was soon discovered to be impossible, chiefly because everybody confided in everybody else, which ended at last in the

whole community consulting together openly on certain vexed points, as to the correctness of this *coiffure*, the cut of that bodice, or the colour of such an one's wig, and so forth.

There were four or five cousins, male and female, staying in the house, who affected to represent different foreign countries, consequently the little congress assumed quite an international character. Hector and Agnes, however, were classical in their tastes, and represented respectively Pygmalion and Galatea, while Gertrude essayed a simple Puritan costume, which well became her, the Squire intending to appear in his uniform as Lord Lieutenant of the county; in short, everybody was coming out in fancy dress except old Mrs. Grayle, who, with her usual unamiability and obstinate spirit, refused to make "a guy of herself to please any one." But there was nothing uncommon in this, for she never did please any one about anything, so nobody cared.

At length New Year's eve arrived, and the carriages rolled up to the Hall door one after another, and discharged their variegated burdens in a seemingly endless stream.

In due course the Merrydale private 'bus disgorged the following incongruous contents:—Old Father Christmas (Sir Francis), a vivandière (Lady Mountjoy), Lady Teazle (Miss Mountjoy), Robinson Crusoe (Clement), Marie Antoinette (Miss Goldsnip), and a hooded Friar (Mr. Goldsnip, her father).

After this cargo was deposited appeared Eily O'Connor, leaning on the arm of Cardinal Wolsey (Arthur Tewkesley and Norah, his wife, a funny little woman from the Emerald Isle), and a whole host of others, until the Hall was crowded with the motley groups, which contradicted history in the broadest way, for here Oliver



Cromwell and Charles the First walked arm-in-arm in friendly fashion, whilst Mary, Queen of Scots, and old John Knox appeared on the most affectionate terms, flirting together in a corner, as did many other traditional foes.

One of Strauss' delicious melodies opened the proceedings, and away whirled the gorgeous dancers, in glorious confusion—an undulating mass of colour, with prismatic effects from the brilliant lights. But having once fairly started them, what more need be said, since ball-room upon ball-room has been described *ad nauseam* in a hundred fictions.

"Norah, my dear," called Mrs. Grayle senior, seated in regal grandeur, as she thought, at one side of the room—the situation rather lending dignity to Mrs. Grayle than Mrs. Grayle to the situation—and looking in her non-fancy dress like a withered old cabbage amid that gay-coloured throng. "Norah," cried she, beckoning to the little Hibernian lady, "tell me now, what on earth do you call yourself?"

"Faith, I'm Miss Eily O'Connor, ma'am, the Colleen Bawn," replied Mrs. Tewkesley, exaggerating her brogue—which was in some degree natural—to suit the character. "Bad luck to your blind ould eyes, not to know," she added, aside.

"Ah, very pretty, very pretty indeed," said Mrs. Grayle, condescendingly, and criticizing the dress through her eye-glasses.

"I'm thinking it is, ma'am," returned the lively little lady, with a pert curtsy. "And so the Squire tould me, too."

Now the very mention of the Squire by Mrs. Tewkesley was touching dangerous ground. Old Mrs. Grayle was extremely jealous of the influence exercised over the lord of the

manor by the parson's wife, for the latter was perpetually buttonholeing him on parochial and other matters, and could twist him round her finger easily enough, a feat Mrs. Grayle generally failed to accomplish. That old lady, as a rule, managed to trump up a *casus belli* about once a week against Mrs. Tewkesley, though as far as pugnacity went the fiery little Irish woman was her match, being always ready for a row, like a true Paddy; so there were some pretty free fights between them.

"He did, did he?" exclaimed Mrs. Grayle, with rising ire; "and I'll engage to say you took good care to draw his attention to it." This with an ill-disguised sneer.

"Not I, bedad," retorted Mrs. Tewkesley, carelessly, but with an air as if she were tucking up her sleeves in imagination, preparatory to an encounter. "I've something else to do to-night than set me cap at the ould folks."

"Really!" snorted Mrs. Grayle, fairly briding up. "I think you forget yourself, madam. A married woman, and a clergyman's wife, too, talking about setting your cap, indeed!"

"Luckily for me," replied the Colleen Bawn, clutching the ghost of a shillela in her hand, "me husband's not such a fool as—as *some* people I know." And she glared defiantly at her enemy, as though requesting her to tread on the tail of her coat.

"Meaning to insinuate, I suppose—" began Mrs. Grayle, with an ominous hiss, when fortunately they were interrupted by Cardinal Wolsey, who, seeing that a ring was about to be formed, came up and took the fierce old "Hecate" off to supper.

"Good gracious! how I loathe that old woman," muttered Mrs. Tewkesley, as she glanced contemptuously after her foe, looking rather disappointed at not being

able to have it out on the spot. "Poor Arthur! always making himself a martyr. Faith, that's a rhyme, but with a very poor reason in it. Anyway I don't envy him." And three minutes afterwards the little Colleen Bawn had waltzed off her spleen under the immediate superintendence of Woopalánne, the Bald Eagle, a tall North American Indian chief who claimed her hand.

"Where's the vivandière? Where's Lady Mountjoy?" inquired Hector, looking about him, as the musicians struck up "*Il Baccio*." "This is our dance. Ah, there she is!" and he hurriedly crossed the room to a quiet nook, where he espied her talking away very earnestly to his mother.

Yes, there she was, electric battery and all, apparently so absorbed in her occupation of bringing the gentle Gertrude under the full influence of those basilisks, that she had quite forgotten about dancing.

Lady Mountjoy was sparkling with a brilliant idea that evening, and was trying to impress upon Gertrude the desirability of making a match between her son, Hector, and Miss Goldsnip, a reputed heiress, and her ladyship's special *protégée pro tem*. Gertrude, however, didn't seem to view the matter in the same light at all; nevertheless, the would-be match-maker was determined to try what she could do with the young people themselves.

"Our dance!" cried she, springing up and taking Hector's arm, who now appeared opportunely in the midst of her eulogiums; then as he led her away, "now would you be offended if I asked you to transfer it to another lady? I've already introduced you, but I see you've only danced with her once;" and before Hector had time to remonstrate, she had pulled up opposite to where Miss Goldsnip was just then seated, partnerless this time, and forthwith handed him over to her.

Thus Pygmalion was once more "saddled" (to use his own expression) with the unflattering impersonator of Marie Antoinette, for, to tell the truth, in his former dance with her, he had not been at all prepossessed in favour either of her appearance, conversation, or manner, and would rather have been excused a repetition of the dose. Added to this, he was in no frame of mind just then for making up to the most desirable female Croesus in the world; certainly not to have her crammed down his throat in this way. In passing through the entrance hall, with one of his partners, a little while before, he had caught sight of that lovely face, which perpetually haunted him now—Lizzie Rolfe had accompanied her father to have a look at the dancers, in common with several of the retainers—and that brief glance of her was a sufficient reminder, if one was needed, to make him less appreciative than ever of other womenkind.

On the other hand, Miss Goldsnip was one of those haughty *parvenus* who thought every one was bound to worship mammon, and therefore ought to kneel to her, so was proportionately piqued at Hector's cool indifference. Hence, they were not a very happily adapted couple.

After a few monosyllabic remarks, and having struggled round the crowded ball-room once or twice, with a mutual air of being thoroughly bored,—

*Pygmalion* (stiffing a yawn, and with difficulty speaking through it), "Do you feel inclined for another turn?" (Aside) "Hope not—she doesn't look as if she did."

*Marie Antoinette* (catching the yawn), "Thank you, no, I'm rather tired." (Aside) "I could dance for ever with a decent partner, though."

*Pygmalion* (with a happy thought). "Perhaps you'd like to sit down, then?"

*Marie Antoinette* (jumping at it). "I think I should, please."

Accordingly, spying Lady Mountjoy close by, watching them, and giving the battery a little holiday, *Pygmalion* forthwith returns the heiress carefully on her chaperon's hands.

*Pygmalion* (as the unfortunate queen reseats herself, with a relieved sigh). "Thank you so very much for the dance, I've enjoyed it immensely." With which dreadful falsehood he bows and leaves her, much to Lady Mountjoy's surprise, as the valse is not yet half over.

But a rather more interesting scene than the above is taking place about the same time in a dimly-lighted little grotto by the conservatory.

Seated in this are *Galatea* and *Robinson Crusoe*, whose conversation, as well as can be judged by their faces in the imperfect light, appears to be of a very serious nature.

"I assure you, *Clement*, you cannot tell how utterly surprised I am to hear you say this."

"Are you, *Agnes*—are you really? Then you never knew—you never felt, I suppose—" he hesitated, and his voice trembled while he added to himself, "And now, alas! it is all too late!"

"As a brother, dear *Clement*, I have always loved, and always shall love you—and as a sister I hoped—"

"Yes—yes. I know, *Agnes*, I know. It ought only to have been that; but I have let it grow upon me day by day—you never guessed the truth, and I have not dared to tell you."

A long pause.

"I thought you asked if I were really engaged merely out of curiosity, *Clement*. I little knew how my reply



would pain you; forgive me if I spoke thoughtlessly—too abruptly.”

“Forgive you, darling!” he cried, taking her hand; “I *must* call you so, though it be for the last time—”

“No, no, dear; why should it be?—at least—let me remain your sister as I have ever been.”

“Ah, it will be so different when you are married, Agnes, and—and belong to another.” He said this with such a heavy sigh, and gulped down the words with a painful choking in his throat.

Neither spoke for a few minutes; but presently he murmured passionately, as if to himself, “Oh, Agnes, Agnes, *how* I have loved you—how I love you still! and you never knew; but now—lost to me for ever!” and the poor boy’s frame seemed to be convulsed with emotion as he said this. Though the agonized words were uttered in a low tone, Agnes partly overheard them, and was deeply distressed at his agitation; but without knowing what solace to offer, she still remained silent, soothingly stroking his hand as it lay in hers. This silence becoming painful and oppressive, she roused herself at last, with an effort, and said in a quiet, gentle tone,—

“Clement, listen to me, dear. A love like yours is indeed worthy of a better object; and most surely I do not deserve such devotion, or the deep feeling in your heart had awakened a response in mine, without the telling. But now, what *can* I do? what can I say to comfort you?”

“Nothing, Agnes, nothing; do not pity me,” he exclaimed, impetuously; “I do not deserve it. I can but blame myself—selfish fellow that I am—I might have spared you this painful scene, thus embittering the dawn of your new life with my sad tale of woe. It is my turn

now to ask *you* to forgive, dear Agnes, and I do: be assured your future happiness in this choice is the most cherished thought I have in the world—my never-ceasing prayer.”

“God bless you, Clem,” she whispered, drawing nearer to him, and pressing a sisterly kiss upon his forehead; “may that joy and happiness which awaits you too be not so far distant as you think.”

Another deep sigh was his only answer; and as they rose together from the seat, she did not observe that settled look of despair on his earnest face—that dead look in those eyes, as if the very life and soul had gone out of him. She did not see this, or her young heart would have ached still more for poor Clement Mountjoy. However, the poet says—

“Love, unreturn’d,  
Hath gracious uses; the keen pang departs,  
The sweetness never—”

and although a heavy burden such as this (to apply an old metaphor) may break the maturer stem, it only serves to bend the yielding sapling, which, with the elasticity of youth, springs back to its normal state, when once relieved of the temporary load.

So we must have some hope for poor young Mountjoy yet, although his case is, I own, a very hard one.

“Why, Agnes, I have been looking for you everywhere,” cried a voice as they emerged from the conservatory; and, turning, she saw her future husband approaching. “Do you know you’ve missed our last dance?”

“Oh, I am so sorry, Albert!” cried Agnes, as she disengaged her hand from Clement’s arm. “I felt a little tired, and I—I was resting in the conservatory.”

"You were? I looked in there, and couldn't see you."

"In the little grotto beyond, I mean. I'm not engaged for this next one, Albert. If you are not, will you dance it instead?"

"Agreed."

Heffernan then led her back into the ball-room; and Agnes noticed that that gloomy frown seemed to have resettled itself on his brow.

"Could it be that he was angry at such a trifle?" she thought, with a slight feeling of misgiving.

No; it was not that, I fancy. Something else had produced that appropriate Mephistophelean look—something, perhaps, which had reminded him of his recent interview with Mrs. Corcoran, and revealed more plainly the impending sword which now seemed to threaten him, and effectually destroyed his enjoyment of the festive scene.

## CHAPTER XII.

"THE MONARCH OF THE GLEN."

"The antler'd monarch . . . . .  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 Like crested leader, proud and high,  
 Toss'd his beam'd frontlet to the sky."

*Sir Walter Scott.*

"A true knight,  
 Not yet mature, yet matchless;  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 Hector, in his blaze of wrath, subscribes  
 To tender objects.

*Shakspeare.*

SQUIRE GRAYLE had always cherished a pet hobby for collecting foreign birds and animals, and acclimatizing them at Barringtrees; and the last importation consisted of some red deer from Scotland, which he wished to add to his menagerie; howbeit, in the somewhat limited space such an experiment was scarcely likely to be a great success. There were only three or four of these animals at present; but if they did well, and agreed with the rest of the stock, Mr. Grayle intended by-and-by to have a small herd of them.

This scheme, however, was nipped in the bud by a certain circumstance which must be explained. It turned out that one of the stags, a royal, captured in its wild state, proved to be an incorrigible nuisance (especially during a certain season of the year), and people were

positively afraid to walk in the park, lest this ferocious monarch of the glen should take it into his head, as he seemed inclined, to impale them on his sharp points, like so many beetles and butterflies, as if he had been a collector of insects, bent on the process of pinning his victims. Complaints being frequent, this pugnacious gentleman, fortunately before he could commence his collection, was degraded from his position as king of the Barringtrees, and driven into a paddock until he learned to behave himself.

It so happened that Master Macbeth, as he was called, had just been liberated again from durance vile, for it was supposed his bump of combativeness had subsided meanwhile, and that with the new year he would turn over a new leaf. But he disappointed this expectation, and soon showed that all seasons were alike to him, and that he was still bent upon making that collection.

A fine, noble-looking beast he was, with his twelve-tined antlers and thick, hairy throat; strong as a bullock and active as a cat; a grand type, indeed, of Landseer's favourites, but one whom it were safer for an artist to study from a respectful distance.

Now, one afternoon, a few days subsequent to the fancy ball, Lizzie Rolfe was making her way across the park in blissful ignorance as to the liberation of this dreaded beast. Had she known that he was again at large she might have thought twice before venturing out alone, for she had often heard her father say that he was "sure the varmint could never be trusted, and ought to be destroyed for a perrulous pest."

Before she had proceeded a quarter of a mile on her way, Lizzie fancied she caught sight of a solitary stag grazing on the further side of a clump of beech-trees, about two hundred yards to her right. From its appear-



ance it made her heart give a sudden jump; but she recollected, with a feeling of reassurance, that Master Macbeth was secure in his paddock—or, at least, she believed so—and continued her walk fearlessly, although an instinctive feeling of dread prompted her to throw a nervous glance now and again towards that clump of beeches.

"It's only one of the other red deer," she argued to herself, on getting a clearer view of the creature through the trees, "and they're harmless enough, father says."

But at this moment the stag shifted its position a little—having been browsing with its head turned from her, so that she only had a foreshortened view of its body—and Lizzie, who still watched it, now distinctly saw the size and points of its branching horns, and thus, to her utter dismay, ascertained that it was the redoubtable Master Macbeth himself, and none other, who was feeding there in solitary grandeur, *otium cum dignitate*.

Her first impulse was to run for her life, but she remembered that this would at once attract the creature's attention, and then, heaven help her! her little feet were scarcely calculated to outstrip those nimble hoofs. No, her second thought was best—to steal quietly along under cover of the big trees, which intervened between her path and the object of alarm, and so hope to escape detection by her light footstep. Poor Lizzie! her every nerve was strained in painful tension as she crept along like a mouse in the vain hope of eluding that antlered monster.

An unlucky twig, which snapped under her foot just at that critical moment, sounded like a pistol fired in her ear, and with anxious terrified eyes she glanced towards the red deer, and gave a thankful sigh of relief as she observed him still browsing peacefully.

Make haste, Lizzie! get on as quickly as you can. Never mind the dried sticks underfoot. If you can only gain the corner of that wood and turn out of sight, you are safe!

Oh, how her heart thumped against her breast as she hurried forward! The first despair of escape had now given place to a natural hope which rose strong within her.

But, alas! at this moment a gentle breeze sprang up, crossing her path, and blowing straight from her to the enemy, when instantly he threw up his magnificent head and sniffed the air suspiciously.

Vain hope, indeed, to think of eluding the acute senses of that Highland monarch. Many a time and oft had he stood sentry to the herd on the distant hills of Scotland, and many a time disappointed the excited gillie who had longed for that noble head after an arduous stalk.

The lightest wind to those keen nostrils, tainted by the far-off presence of man, was as good as a warning bugle-note to a sleeping camp.

But here the situation was reversed, and when the animal detected the human presence, he struck his fore-hoof angrily on the ground, and looked about him; then, catching sight of Lizzie, he turned towards her, and slowly and majestically advanced three or four paces.

Lizzie, still on the anxious watch, saw all this with a sinking at her heart once more, and felt in doubt as to whether she should continue her hurried walk, or stand and face the dangerous stag boldly. She had heard of, and read often, how the human eye may quell the fiercest beast; and certainly such a pretty pair of eyes as hers ought to have softened the heart of that terrible Highlander if he had been anything of a gentleman, which unfortunately he was not.

Desperation actually gave the poor girl courage enough to think of making the experiment, though only for want of a better chance of escape.

The deer had now broken into a springy trot as he came towards her, and, seeing this, Lizzie, acting on the desperate alternative at once, stopped short and fronted him. Immediately she was rewarded for her pluck and presence of mind by seeing the savage beast halt as suddenly. He was now a little over a hundred yards away, and gazed at the girl as if in utter astonishment at her audacity. At the same time Lizzie felt little hope of keeping him long at bay in this manner, but suddenly her attention was drawn to a huge old oak which stood within a few yards of her. Her only chance, then, if the stag showed the slightest signs of hostility, was to make a frantic rush for the friendly trunk, and get behind it before she was attacked. This protection, however, she was also well aware could only be very temporary, since her strength would soon fail her, and unless timely help came, she knew she must fall beneath those cruel hoofs and be gored to death by the deadly horns.

Keeping her eyes steadily fixed on her unwelcome *vis-à-vis*, Lizzie, offering up a prayer for her safety, now glided by almost imperceptible degrees towards the tree; but before she had lessened the distance between it and herself by more than two or three yards, the stag made an angry movement, struck the turf again sharply with his hoof, and uttered a deep guttural sound, which caused her heart to leap again with terror. Forgetting all caution at this critical juncture, she hastened her stealthy approach towards the oak of refuge—and it was well she did so, or she never could have reached it!

The vicious beast, having conquered his curiosity, which alone had kept him at bay for a minute, now lowered his

head, and without further warning rushed towards her. This was a signal for Lizzie to fly for the tree, which she just managed to get to in time, and as she darted behind its gigantic trunk, Master Macbeth dashed past like lightning. In a moment he returned to repeat the charge, more furious than ever, with eyes glowering fiercely, and distended nostrils, and once more the terrified girl evaded him with the energy of despair. But this could not last long; she was already nearly fainting, while her knees trembled as if she would fall every minute.

Shrieking again and again for help, Lizzie scarcely remembered anything further—her brain began to swim, and more by instinct than anything else she kept the tree between herself and her merciless assailant for a few moments longer.

Then at last, oh welcome sound! she heard the fierce barking of dogs, then a loud shout and some one calling her by name, and then a rushing of confused noises in her ears—the sky grew dark, and she sank down at the foot of the oak in a dead swoon.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Have at him, Captain! worry him, Pilot! By heaven, you brute! you shall have both barrels if you come here."

Thus Hector Grayle, in angry excitement, as with one arm he supported the unconscious Lizzie, grasping his gun with the disengaged hand.

He was panting for breath, having run at top speed from a distant corner of the park, where he had been amusing himself in a small spinney with some "stub" rabbits.

His quick ear had detected the cries for help, when he at once hurried off in the direction of the sound, and caught sight of Master Macbeth at his old games; but



Hector little knew then who the victim was. As he neared the spot, however, he recognized poor Lizzie in the last stage of terror, and rushing madly forward, utterly regardless whether the stag attacked him or not, he raised her in his arms just as she had collapsed and fallen to the ground.

Meanwhile Hector's two retrievers, Captain and Pilot, had gone straight at the savage hart with a ferocity which looked like eating him up on the spot, horns, hoofs, and all.

Thus foiled in his murderous assault—for this attack on the part of the dogs of course diverted his attention from the fainting girl—Master Macbeth responded to their fierce clamour by a disdainful sweep of his antlers, which kept the indignant Captain and his mate at a respectful distance. Still the effect was the same as if they had fastened themselves to his throat and sucked his very life-blood, for the common enemy seemed by this interference to have forgotten his late intended victim, which was lucky for him, or he would most assuredly have received a couple of barrels of "number six" from Hector's gun. After striking at the dogs once or twice with his hoofs, as if he meant to teach them a lesson in boxing, and making another sudden swoop with his horns, which very nearly settled the Captain, the haughty monarch suddenly raised his head, as though a thought struck him that their impotent clamour was beneath his notice. So, after a moment's pause, he stalked slowly off, with a majestic air, scorning such small fry as unworthy of his steel. The retrievers made a feint at "harassing his retreat," but this was a very feeble performance, and met with the contempt it deserved.

"Lizzie, look up—do look up, there is no danger now," said Hector, trying by fanning her face to restore



consciousness, for there was not a drop of water nearer than the lake to revive her, and he began to get frightened at the prolonged swoon. The stag having moved off, he had placed his gun on the ground, and was devoting all his attention to the insensible form.

How lovely she looked as she reclined there, her face thrown back, the rippling hair fallen loose across her bosom, and the lips slightly parted, while a soft sigh escaped them as of grateful relief.

"Lizzie, pray look at me, you are quite safe now—here in my arms, my darling, oh, my darling;" and no longer able to restrain himself, he clasped her to him and pressed a burning kiss on those sweet lips.

Presently she unclosed her eyes, and seeing the handsome face so close to hers, a slight blush tinged her cheek. Then, making an effort to raise her head, she exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Hector, is it you? what has happened? where am I?"

"Don't be frightened, Lizzie, the danger is over—"

"Oh, I remember," she murmured, "that dreadful stag! oh, and you—you saved me!"—whereupon she closed her eyes again and seemed almost to relapse into a state of unconsciousness.

"Do you feel better now, Lizzie?" he asked presently, gazing in ardent admiration at the beautiful face he supported so tenderly, and longing to say something more loving and endearing, albeit he refrained now that she had once opened her eyes and recognized him.

Fie! Hector, was it right of you to steal that kiss when she lay helpless in your arms? You fear even to call her "darling" now that you think she can hear you. But this was not merely owing to the coyness of a first love—for Hector Grayle had never known the "power" before—it was from a feeling of intense respect

in which he held her very name; a conviction that she would be virtuously indignant at the least undue familiarity. This respect for the girl was a sure and healthy sign of the purest feeling, and it must be confessed he felt even now ashamed of having stolen that kiss. But he had resolved to tell her the whole truth, and surely an open declaration of his love should absolve him from the petty theft.

Lizzie, having quite come to herself after a little while, rose at length to her feet, and thanked her preserver earnestly again and again for having saved her life.

Now the actual fact of succouring lovely woman in distress is very romantic at all times, no matter if the rescue is attended by little or no risk to the rescuer. But when it happens to be the chosen knight who saves his lady-love from the jaws of death, it enhances the romance tenfold.

Although Hector depreciated the service he had rendered, saying it was his dogs and not he who had driven off the stag, Lizzie experienced none the less a delicious thrill of pleasure when she felt she owed her life to him, the hero of her dreams—for it is needless to conceal the fact, she was as much in love with Hector as he with her. But the disparity of their positions was calculated to make her the more prudent and reticent, for Lizzie was no thoughtless flirt, and an affair of this kind was likely to go hard with her, especially as she felt nothing could come of it but disappointment and unhappiness.

"Which way were you going, Lizzie?" asked Hector, as he picked up his gun and called the dogs to heel. "You must let me escort you."

"Thank you, sir," replied Lizzie, "I was only just walking as far as the village to do some shopping."

“Come along, then, little nurse,” he rejoined, in a cheery voice. “You needn’t be the least afraid now; it’s *my* turn to take care of *you*, isn’t it? And you shall see what a good protector I’ll be.”

“I’m sure you are. I should never feel a bit frightened with you, Mr. Hector,” said she, with charming *naïveté*, as they walked along together.

“That’s right. And as for that villainous old bully, Master Macbeth, if he comes within fifty yards of us again, he shall have the contents of my gun as sure as he’s a royal. Not worthy of royalty exactly to behave so to a poor unprotected little girl, was it? However, thank God, it was no worse, Lizzie,” and he gave her such an earnest look as made the warm blood course through her veins like quicksilver.

“But the Squire would be very angry if you shot the animal, wouldn’t he, Mr. Hector?”

“I can’t help that. I certainly shall if the brute gives me cause again; though it would take a bullet to polish him off properly. However, I shall tell my grandfather of this adventure, and no doubt the dangerous beast will be venison before many days. Now, Lizzie, if you will go on into the village and finish your commissions, I’ll meet you at the lower gates in an hour’s time. I have some things to attend to in the stables, so it won’t be out of my way; and of course I must take care of you on your return home.”

“Oh, no, thank you, Mr. Hector,” replied Lizzie, diffidently. “I couldn’t trouble you to go all the way back with me. I could get one of the men—”

“Would you prefer that?” he asked, with a peculiar smile.

“Oh, no, of course not,” she answered, quickly; adding, “I only meant I didn’t like to be such a trouble.”

"But I *wish* to escort you, Lizzie. Do you understand me?" As he said this he gave her that earnest look again, and there was just a shade of authority in his tone, as if he thought he had a right to appropriate her now.

This was very sweet to Lizzie, although she hardly liked to own it to herself; nevertheless it did not escape her.

"Very well, sir," she murmured, dropping her eyes as the blush returned to her cheek; "if you really don't mind."

"I certainly shouldn't like you to walk through the park with any one else at night; that is, while that creature is about," he added, quickly, as if to qualify his words. "So, remember, Lizzie, in an hour's time, by the gates; don't be later."

She promised not to keep him waiting, and tripped off towards the village, Hector following her with his eyes till she passed out of sight.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## CUPID'S SLAVES.

"I know that thou dost love me. I in vain  
 Strive to love aught of earth or heaven but thee.  
 Thou art my first, last, only love ; nor shall  
 Another even tempt my heart."

*Bailey.*

"Yet when I approach  
 Her loveliness, so absolute she seems,  
 And in herself complete ; so well to know  
 Her own, that what she wills to do or say,  
 Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best."

*Milton.*

It was not at all likely that such an attractive girl as Lizzie Rolfe should be without admirers and would-be lovers in her own class of life. In the little world at Barringtree alone their name was legion, and there were other aspirants beyond its immediate radius. But to each and all the gamekeeper's daughter preserved the same discreet deportment, keeping them at a judicious distance by consummate tact, and yet without wounding their feelings.

Amongst these admirers was a certain individual, more desperately enamoured, and more importunate than the rest. This was Allan Woodruff, one of her father's subordinates, commonly called "Woolly" Woodruff,



from his having a shock head of black curly hair, resembling a negro's.

He was a burly Suffolk yokel, boasting a pair of shoulders like Goliath, and with not altogether a bad cast of countenance; though these advantages were somewhat counteracted by a violent temper—sulky as well as violent, when he looked a very devil—and a coarse vocabulary. Lizzie had almost learned to consider this fellow in the light of a necessary nuisance to her existence, since he was perpetually pressing his suit, notwithstanding sharp rebuffs from old Gideon and Mrs. Rolfe, and scant encouragement from herself.

As Lizzie made her way through the village, all the shopping commissions seemed to have gone out of her head. There was no room for anything but the recollection of her late adventure and escape; and this, of course, conjured up a whirlwind of sweet but conflicting thoughts, in which, equally of course, the form of Hector Grayle took the lead. She looked forward to, and yet half dreaded her walk back with him, for there was a peculiar earnestness in his manner when he pressed the point, and she felt sure something unusual would come of that walk. But an undefined feeling of pleasure brought a fluttering to her heart when she recalled his passionate look; yet in no form of words had he committed himself that *she* had heard.

Whilst in the midst of such cogitations as these Lizzie was hardly in the humour to welcome any interruption, more especially from that everlasting tormenter, Allan Woodruff, whom she now encountered in the street, and who brought her abruptly down to earth from fairy land, by arresting her steps and accosting her as follows:—

“Hulloa, Lizzie, where are ye off to in such a hurry

with your eyes on your toes? Can't yer look at a feller?"

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure. I never saw you," she said, preparing to walk on.

"I dare say yow didn't," was his reply, in an offended tone. "There's none so blind as them as won't see. But where are yer going?"

"Only to the shop."

"Well, yow 'ont mind if I walk with yer, will yer?" he asked, suiting the action to the word, as she moved forward.

"Not if you wish to do so, Allan; but I'm rather in a hurry.

"Yes, yow're allus in a hurry I think when yer see *me*. Why can't yer be a little more social like, Lizzie? I'm sure I haint never done yer no harm; nayow, have I?" This was the whining way he had of urging his suit.

"Really I don't see why you ask such a question, Allan," returned Lizzie, a little impatient at his silly speech. "Of course you haven't, why should you?"

"Well, I don't 'now. I don't see why I should," he continued, at the same time viciously kicking a stone out of his way, as though it had been in league with her against him. "But yow allus fare to treat *me* as if I was dut under yer foot."

"That's entirely your fancy, Allan. I never wish to be rude to any one, and you know that; but I really can't go over all this subject again; I am quite tired of it. Come, good night," she added, holding out her hand as she reached the shop, and was about to enter. "I must leave you now. I'm going in here."

"No, I 'ont say good night yet," he observed, for the thought occurred to him of a chance not to be lost, "'cos

yow ha' got to go back across the park, and I'll wait and go with yer."

"Not to night, Allan—" began Lizzie, more than ever vexed and worried by his importunity.

"Why not? Look yow here," he argued, as another happy idea struck him, "that's dayown-roight daing'rus for yow to goo back aloun, so I tell yer. Yow was lucky to get here. Du yow 'now that there red stag's abayout?"

"Yes, I know, thank you, Allan; but I *have* some one coming to meet me, so I shall be all safe. Good night;" and without giving her *bête noir* time to say anything further, she disappeared into the shop.

"Oh! yow ha' got some one comin' to meet yer, have yer?" muttered Woolly Woodruff to himself, with ironical emphasis. "Nayow, if that some one had ha' bin your farther, yow'd ha' said sow; sow I'll jist see who that some one is, my laidy;" and ruminating thus, in high dudgeon at his services being rejected, he betook himself to "The Three Cranes" (the crest of the Grayle family), to soothe his ruffled spirit with a pot of "'arf an' 'arf."

The little god, Cupid, is ever punctilious in the matter of appointments; and the man in love, unless he be a phlegmatic, lukewarm creature, unworthy of the noble passion, is invariably punctual at the place of rendezvous—more generally a good deal beforehand.

As Rosalind remarks to Orlando—"Break an hour's promise in love? He that will divide a minute into a thousand parts, and break but a part of the thousandth part of a minute in the affairs of love, it may be said of him, that Cupid hath clapped him o' the shoulder, but I warrant him heart-whole."

Hector Grayle was, of course, no exception to the rule of "proper lovers," and had been waiting at the park

gates at least twenty minutes before Lizzie reached them.

"I began to think I had missed you," he exclaimed, as she appeared at last. "However, better late than never."

"But am I late, Mr. Hector? I didn't fancy I'd been gone an hour."

"Perhaps not; it seemed to me like three, though," he observed, smiling.

It was exactly forty-five minutes by the Hall clock over the stables since they had separated. Such is—love.

As they started on their return journey across the park it was rapidly growing dark, so they did not observe a third party dogging their footsteps; and, as that third party kept at a respectful distance, *his* footsteps were not likely to attract attention.

For some little time neither spoke. At length, by way of breaking the ice, Hector inquired,—

"You don't feel nervous now, do you, Lizzie?"

"Oh, not the least, thank you, sir!"

"Master Macbeth will have to transfix me and the dogs before he shall touch you, I can tell him."

The tall figure of her brave knight towered in the gloaming beside her, and made Lizzie feel so snug and secure. She looked upon him as quite a hero since he had saved her life, and it was pleasant to dwell on that thought.

"All bullies are cowards, though," he added, "and he won't face this," tapping his gun. "He can smell powder as quick as a crow, I'll be bound."

A pause.

"You're not cold, I hope?" he asked presently. "If so, we'll walk a little quicker."

But Lizzie was not at all cold, and her heart was beating fast enough to keep up a good circulation, even had it been freezing ten times as hard as it was. Another pause, rather longer this time.

"To tell the truth, Lizzie," he began again, "I'm in no hurry to reach the end of this walk; I—I have so much to say to you—something I *must* tell you. You won't mind?"

To this there was no answer. What could she reply? He had all the conversation to himself.

"I don't think you need be ashamed to hear it, and," he added, emphatically, "I'm sure I'm not ashamed to own it. It is that I—I love you, Lizzie." Full stop. Was this all, then? He said he had so much to say, and this was stale news, since her own instinct had told her as much long ago. But this was not all by any means. Having cleared the big jump, nothing could stop him now, when once he had recovered himself on landing.

"Do you understand me, darling?" he continued earnestly, and taking her small trembling hand in his; "I love you with my whole soul. I know your gentle nature, Lizzie; your pure heart and proud spirit. I know more of your character than you think; and, perhaps, not knowing mine, you might accept such a declaration at first as a slight rather than a compliment. But, by heaven! what I say I mean. Such words have never passed my lips before, and no power on earth could ever make me retract or regret them."

He paused for a reply, but receiving none, went on again, not a whit abashed by her silence. Something had taken place, perhaps, in that short silence. What was it? A slight pressure of the hand? Who can tell? At any rate it seemed to encourage him.

"Whatever happens, Lizzie, remember what I have



told you. *I love you.* Is not that enough? You have won all my heart, and my whole life shall be dedicated to yours. So long as you can accept that love and return it, so long am I your future husband, and no other woman in this world shall be my wife."

Precocious youth! A boy, just out of his teens, talking about being husband and wife—to the daughter of his own gamekeeper, too! But the incongruity of the proposed arrangement did not seem to strike him.

As he finished speaking he placed his arm around her—though she made every effort to resist him—and, bending down, pressed a long and passionate kiss to her lips, for the second time that afternoon, if she had only known it! Now this was not to be done comfortably while walking, so for the moment they stopped, as if by mutual consent, although *she* did so against her will, since his arm arrested her progress.

Here the third party stopped likewise, and seemed, in the twilight, to be apostrophizing, with a stick, the first pale stars of evening, as if annoyed with them for slyly winking at the goings-on of those two in front.

Lizzie's heart was too full to speak at first. She also had much to say, but could not frame the words just yet. Their purport, too, was somewhat different from Hector's, and perhaps would hardly please him when he heard them. But a strong feeling of duty was within the girl, which had only given way for the moment to his passionate avowal. She felt then that she could not help herself, but meant to be so good afterwards.

Hector Grayle had said he knew her character, but he did not half know it if he thought that his mere words had conquered all her scruples and resolutions. Those words she felt sure had been spoken from the heart. Such words, too, might *she* have spoken, for she loved

him as well—far too well, she feared, for her own happiness.

Lizzie Rolfe was a girl, indeed, of no ordinary character. Carefully brought up by Gideon and his wife, who naturally doted on her, she was an honour to their tuition, and had well repaid the old people by never having given them a moment's anxiety in her life. From a fondness for reading, her mind had become, to a certain degree, self-cultivated, and reached a far higher level than that of most people in her class. Her singularly beautiful face had, of course, brought her many admirers, as I have said, and some of these were rather above her in station; but none could turn *her* head, for she was the last girl in the world to fall a victim to her own vanity. Like Hector, however, she had never been in love before, so that made a difference. The struggle, therefore, was all the harder, and it was the more difficult to determine on the proper course—the only safe one, as she considered, open to them both—for the little ship would not answer readily to its helm, and kept tossing and tumbling over the turbulent waves, as Cupid beckoned from one shore and duty from the other. But Lizzie had the strictest sense of what was right, and knew that a clandestine love affair with Hector Grayle would be decidedly wrong; so her resolution was soon formed.

They resumed their walk without speaking. He was waiting for her reply, and she was still silent.

The third party seemed to have got over his sudden antipathy to the stars, and, with the stick lowered to its ordinary use, continued to follow at the same respectful distance.

They had now reached the borders of a plantation of firs and larches in the neighbourhood of High Lodge, and Hector, with a regretful feeling that their walk was

so nearly over, halted against the palings which surrounded this plantation, and said anxiously,—

“Lizzie, darling, we have only a few more minutes together. Your silence fills me with misgivings. Won’t you speak, dear? Why won’t you speak?”

“Oh, Mr. Hector, I—I really don’t know what to say,” she murmured, in a low tone. “If I were only a lady I *could* answer you frankly and truthfully, but—”

“But you *will* be a lady when you are my wife, my darling,” argued Hector, tenderly, and drawing her to him as he leant against the fence. “A lady! psha! What is there in the word? Away with such empty nonsense! You are my first and only love—my pure little angel. Isn’t that good enough to be my wife? A lady, indeed!”—he grew quite impatient as he spoke—“to me you are all that is good, gentle, and noble by nature; that is *my* idea of a lady.”

“Please don’t think me ungracious,” rejoined Lizzie, looking up into his face with soft pleading eyes. “I know you mean what you say. I have every faith in you, but you really must not talk to me of such things. It cannot be, and I have no right to listen to you.”

“But why not? why cannot it be, Lizzie? We may have some time to wait, perhaps—”

“A long, long time,” she answered, sadly; “never is a very long time, and I know it must be—*never*.” There was no mistaking the firmness with which this was said.

“Oh, darling, pray don’t be so hopeless, so dreadfully hopeless. Only trust in me—why should you doubt?”

“I do not doubt you indeed, but it is wrong. I am wicked to let you even think of love and—and marriage, much less talk of it, to one in my position. What would your good, kind mother say? what would all your friends say of you, and me, too, if such a thing were known?”

No, no, you have the whole world before you, to choose where you may; should I be blessed with happiness if I took you at your word and blighted your young life? Never. You will thank me for this by-and-by; perhaps respect me the more for it."

"There can be no real love without respect, Lizzie, and as I can never love you less, I can hardly respect you more. Oh, darling, what can I say to move you? You are cold and cruel in your words—"

"No, no, indeed—not cold and cruel; do not think that of me; I could not speak as I have, perhaps, if—if—I did not feel as I do." She had hesitated, and the last words were sighed softly, as if substituted for others.

"Even now I am my own master, Lizzie. I am of age, as you know; but let some little time elapse; I will be content to wait patiently if you wish it; and then if I claim you by and by, would you still demur? Trust me, *I* shall never change."

"Nor I," she murmured.

"Then you would still refuse me?" cried he, impetuously, and misunderstanding her. "Even if I proved faithful for a whole year, two whole years, and then claimed you as my wife—no matter what the world might say—it would make no difference? Oh, Lizzie," he continued hastily, in a voice of mingled reproach and disappointment, and never waiting for an answer, "I understand you now; the love is all on my side. *You* do not love!"

"Indeed, indeed I do!" she exclaimed, completely off her guard. The passionate words had burst from her lips before she could stop them.

This was enough for Hector, who caught her in his arms, and kissing her sweet face rapturously, cried, in triumph,—



"Silly, foolish little girl! then you *shall* be mine, in spite of yourself."

She did not struggle now—indeed it would have been useless—she did not attempt to avert his impassioned caresses; but when he desisted, merely disengaged herself from his embrace, and said quietly,—

"You do not know me yet; but as I have confessed, I may as well say on. The very love I own would make me more determined, more resolved to save you from yourself. As you feel now, so you speak, I fully believe, and on my account you shall never have cause to regret your words. You say you will not change, neither shall I; let time prove that; but though we both avow the same, remember there is no compact—nothing to bind either—we are free as though no word of love had passed between us."

"But what am I to understand?"—asked Hector, puzzled by the girl's simple eloquence.

"I cannot, will not say more," she answered firmly; "indeed I have said too much."

"No, no; let it be so then," he exclaimed, seizing her hand again, "let there be a tacit understanding between us, and no more than that at present. Well, well, I must be content to accept the compromise. Your decision is best and wisest, I daresay, though it is very, very hard to abide by—for me, at least. Meanwhile I think I shall go abroad for a year or two—perhaps to India, as was suggested to me only the other day. But wherever I may go, or wherever I may be, you may trust me, Lizzie. You shall see how *I* can love—how real love, tried by waiting, goes hand in hand with faith, and never dies."

Speaking thus fervidly, his eyes beaming with honest emotion, Lizzie felt that such a love as this was worth



having indeed, and sighed to think that, coming from him, it should be as forbidden fruit to one in her position.

"It were all one,  
That I should love a bright partic'lar star,  
And think to wed it, he is so above me :  
In his bright radiance and collateral light  
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere."

Such thought, clothed in simple phrase, may have passed through Lizzie's mind as she reflected on the difference of their positions. Rank, that inexorable barrier, stood between her and her love, and, come what may, she would never let him stoop to claim her hand. What right, then, had she to hope herself, or give him hope? She even regretted that she had said so much, little though it was.

The moon had now joined the inquisitive stars as spectators of this romance, and her silvery sheen glimmered through the firs and larches overhead, seeming to smile softly on these sad lovers. They stood side by side for a few moments without speaking, Hector, the while, retaining her hand in his, when suddenly she withdrew it with a start, and glancing timidly into the dark plantation, whispered anxiously, "What was that? I'm sure I heard a footstep."

"Down, Pilot!" cried Hector, as the retriever uttered a low growl. They both listened attentively, but no further sound reached them. And now Lizzie suddenly recollected that it was getting late, and that the old people might be alarmed at her absence, so begged Hector not to detain her longer, and they moved on once more towards the cottage, Hector saying as they did so,—

"We *must* meet again, and soon, my darling."

"Oh no, Mr. Hector; indeed we must not—we cannot—"

"Only once, I implore you, Lizzie," he pleaded. "We do not quite understand each other yet, I think. You will not refuse me this little request. I will do all you wish in the future; you may depend on me."

Well, it were better for him to understand her thoroughly, she thought; so, perhaps, there would be no great harm in *one* more meeting—only one! Especially if he really meant to go away for a time.

Poor Lizzie! She did so want to do what was right; but Hector Grayle tried her sorely, and she was but a woman—nay, a mere child, loving him, oh so dearly.

As they neared the cottage it was agreed that she should go in alone; not that they were ashamed to be seen thus together, but each entertained the same feeling, by tacit consent, that their interview was to be a sacred secret between them.

"Well, good night, my little darling," sighed Hector, at last. "We *must* part now, I suppose." And when he kissed her this time it was not a case of stealing, for she returned the kiss. After all, it could not be so very wrong just this once, she protested to her own conscience, so that she kept her good resolutions for the future! But Lizzie ought to have been very careful. Just that once is very frequently once too often, and spite of all the best resolutions in the world, is liable, like a dangerous current, to draw the wavering bark into a sea of troubles, with fierce breakers ahead, and perilous rocks hidden beneath the surface.

As Hector made his way back towards the Hall his mind was filled with strange wild thoughts, doubts, and fears, intermixed with desperate resolves, and above them all rose the picture of that beautiful face which so infatuated him. Yet it were a misnomer to call his love a mere infatuation. It was more than that; for, to do him justice, not the face

alone, but the whole character of the girl, had thus enslaved him.

On going past the plantation again his dogs stopped suddenly and uttered once more a low growl, as if some evil spirit were abroad which troubled them. But Hector was too preoccupied to pay heed to their warning, and whistling them to follow, walked on through the park.

It was a bright frosty evening, and the cold light of the moon, which had risen in subdued resplendency, cast deep shadows on the ground, like phantoms of the passing figures.

Before he had proceeded many yards Hector became conscious of another shadow in his wake, and looking round, observed a man following close behind him. But as there was nothing unusual in this, since any one else might be crossing the park at the same time, he took no notice of it until the figure drew up level with him, when the dogs showed some signs of recognition, by sniffing round the individual, and wagging their tails.

"Who is that?" asked Hector, adding, as he recognized him, "oh, it's you, is it, Woodruff? A fine evening—good night to you."

The man, however, merely touched his hat, and continued walking by Hector's side for a few strides without saying anything.

Suddenly he stopped and blurting out,—

"I want to speak to *yow*, sir, if *yow* please," folded his arms, and looked anything but amiable in the weird moonlight. Hector stopped also.

"Certainly, Woodruff, what is it?" inquired he, rather surprised at the fellow's manner.

"P'r'aps it aint for the likes o' me to *dictate* to the likes o' *yow*, sir, a gentleman; but what I want to 'now

is, du yow think it's right to carry on with a poor young gal like that there?" tossing his head towards the lodge.

"What do you mean, Woodruff?" asked Hector, in a sharp tone, though he knew what he meant perfectly well.

"I mean that there gal, Lizzie Rolfe. That's who I mean, sir."

"And pray who made *you* her guardian, I should like to know? What have you to do with her affairs or mine?"

"Nothin' with yourn, I dessay, sir. But I have with hers. I love that gal, and no wonder she 'ont look at me if yow fine gintleman go a turnin' of her head."

"I don't think you know what you are talking about, man," said Hector, haughtily, and preparing to move on. "You had better hold your tongue and mind your own business."

"Yes, but that *is* my business, sir," answered the other, sulkily. "And I *do* know what I'm talking about."

"Now, no impertinence, Woodruff, if you please. Keep a civil tongue in your head, and listen to me. Taking it for granted—which I don't, mind—that you have any right whatever to couple Lizzie Rolfe's name with yours, what is all this about? What makes you speak in this manner?"

"Well, sir, what I've heard's enough to make a man speak, I think."

"Heard? When?"

"This very evenun', o'coorse. Not ten minutes ago."

"Oh, oh—I understand, then," said Hector, as the recollection flashed across him of the footstep in the

wood, and the growling of the dogs. "Do you mean to tell me, Woodruff, that you were in that plantation just now?"

"What if I was, sir? It's my business in them woods as one of the kippers."

"Your business this time, though, was playing the part of eavesdropper; a sneak, in fact," and Hector's blood boiled at the man's effrontery.

"I overheard what yow and she was a sayin', if that's what yow want to 'now,'" mumbled Woodruff, coolly.

"Then what the devil do you mean by it, you impudent fellow? How dare you go sneaking about in that fashion? You'll repent this sort of conduct with me, I can tell you," exclaimed Hector, with repressed choler, although he so far nearly lost control over himself as to strike the man down where he stood. Only one thing restrained him, which was that an open rupture might make matters worse—would probably lead to Lizzie's name being compromised, and he was very anxious to suppress the least breath of scandal with regard to her. For her sake, then, and hers only, he would be cautious. He did not care a pin about himself.

So it came to this—that the cherished interview which they would fain have kept from being revealed to all the world—the story of their pure love, which they treasured as a sacred secret in their hearts—was at the mercy of this fellow—in all likelihood a vindictive fellow, too, owing to his acute jealousy. It was cruelly vexatious! too maddening for words!

Hector was sadly put to it, and did not, for the time, know exactly what course to adopt. He was, perhaps, inclined to magnify Woodruff's offence in having thus spied on his interview with Lizzie Rolfe, and was the quicker to take umbrage at his dogged manner—which



was habitual to the man—from the humiliation he felt at having been thus watched by one of their own servants.

But the lower orders are not so nice as to little points of honour and candid dealings; and, after all, Woodruff had acted merely from a jealous impulse, and with a desire to protect the girl from harm, even if she did reject his addresses, since he argued that an affair of this kind could bode her no good. In the meeting he witnessed he had seen more than he had heard, and therefore judged from outward appearances rather than words exchanged.

"Threats, or no threats, Mr. Hector," continued he, as his young master paused for a minute, "*I ain't a mite afeerd; I hain't done nothin' to be 'shamed of.*"

"You call playing the sneak nothing to be ashamed of, indeed!" cried Hector, only condescending to parley further with the fellow in order to gain time and think of some plan whereby he could silence him.

"No; I say agin," repeated Woodruff, emboldened by Hector's evident embarrassment, "*I ha' got no call to be 'shamed of anything I ha' done, though mayhap you have, sir.*"

"That'll do," rejoined Hector, fiercely; "hold your tongue; you've said quite enough. It is not for me to discuss such a subject with *you*, my grandfather's servant," he added, in a proud tone; "so let that suffice. I will only add this—You say you love that girl;"—the words almost choked Hector; the very idea of such a thing!—"and no one can respect her more than I do; then for *her* sake you ought also to wish that this matter goes no farther; that her good name should not be sullied by the lips of every scandal-monger, in fact—"

"Oh, I don't care what folks say *now*, sir," interrupted Woodruff, moodily. "I heerd and saw quite enough to-night to choke me off, I can tell yer."

"Then you wish to defy me?" There was a suppressed anger in the words which might have warned the man.

"Oh ah! I don't care what I do, nor what I says, so there!"

"You will regret this to-morrow, probably," observed Hector, still keeping his temper with wonderful self-command. "Listen to me, Woodruff. I'll give you one other chance, and you had better sleep on it. Mind you, I am not the least ashamed of what has transpired; but I do *not* choose that Lizzie Rolfe's name should be bandied about at the public-house and elsewhere; therefore, if you keep your own counsel in this matter, and to-morrow come to me with an apology for your mean conduct and insolence to-night, it will be better for you. But if you don't, I'll take care you are punished as you deserve for that conduct; no matter what you may divulge as the result of your sneaking propensity; and you need not expect to find a home any longer on *this* estate."

Hector was driven into a corner, or he would hardly have been so severe; he was at his wits' end to preserve *her* pure name from the loose and groundless scandal to which this affair, if bruited abroad, might too easily give rise; and he was determined to "scotch the snake" at all events, either by threats or conciliation.

"The world with calumny abounds,  
The whitest virtue slander wounds:  
These are whose joy is, night and day,  
To talk a character away:—

and Barringtrees was quite as bad as Belgravia or Mayfair in that respect.

Observing the apparent indifference with which Woodruff received his speech, Hector waxed very wrath indeed, and continued, in fierce and excited tones,—

"One word more, my man! As a parting remembrance, when you get your dismissal from here, by heaven! I'll give you such a horse-whipping as you'll never forget to the last day of your life."

Young Hector Grayle looked really dangerous now; so much so that Woodruff cowered before him, and only muttered something sulkily as he took a step back from the towering figure which threatened him.

Noticing that the effect of his angry menace was not lost on the man, Hector added, in a somewhat calmer tone,—

"Now you know what to expect. Do as I have told you, and all will be well; but if not, take the consequences."

So saying, he turned on his heel, and left Woodruff standing in the pathway, growling to himself like distant thunder.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“EXTRAORDINARY RUN WITH LORD BUCKNAM’S STAGHOUNDS.”

“Bright chanticleer proclaims the dawn,  
And spangles deck the thorn ;  
The loving herds now quit the lawn,  
The lark springs from the corn.  
Dogs, huntsmen, round the window throng,  
Fleet Towler leads the cry;  
Arise the burthen of their song,  
*This day a stag must die.*

With a hey, ho, chevy,  
Hark forward, hark forward, tantivy ! &c.”

*Old Hunting Song.*

DAYS passed, and Hector, hearing no more of the matter, concluded that Woodruff had thought it wiser to hold his tongue ; and although the man had not yet tendered the prescribed apology, his young master was content to waive that ceremony ; for on reflection, he could not, in his calmer moments, make the underkeeper out quite so culpable as, in his anger, he had deemed him. For obvious reasons, too, he was glad to let the affair blow over, and was resolved that this should be a lesson to him, and a caution as to how he risked the good name of her he loved for the future.

Meanwhile, though Hector had overlooked Woodruff’s conduct, he had not done so with regard to Master Mac-

beth, whose villainous behaviour he duly brought to the Squire's notice, and having satisfied his grandfather as to the dangerous nature of the animal, its death-warrant had been reluctantly signed.

But it was not intended that the noble stag should be put out of the world in an ignominious fashion, by "potting" him with a rifle or cutting his throat, but that he should have a run for his life; and accordingly Lord Bucknam was invited to bring his staghounds over for the purpose. The meet was fixed for Barringtrees Park, and it was arranged that the chase should be "run out on its merits," as it were, *à outrance*—it being understood that the deer was to be killed at the finish, and not merely taken.

The day chosen for this stag-hunt dawned propitiously, with "a southerly wind and a cloudy sky" (though the first finds less favour nowadays in the eyes of the modern Nimrod), and all that was desirable for a hunting morning. The frost was well out of the ground, yet the thaw had not made it very heavy going, and there was every promise of a burning scent, so what more could the most *exigeant* huntsman wish for?

One hunt breakfast is much like another, and may be briefly summed up by tea and top-boots, pink coats and prodigious appetites, and cherry brandy, curaçao, or other liqueurs to wind up with; and I might almost say that most runs are alike, though some are exceptional, and this was one of them.

The park, in the vicinity of the Hall, presented a lively scene by eleven o'clock; every one in the neighbourhood, far and near, entitled to be called anybody, being present at the meet, and all the nobodies as well. There were two or three well-appointed drags and a goodly show of colour altogether, a strong force of pink coats being



relieved here and there by a few "currant-jelly-dog" gentlemen in green, and a fair sprinkling of ladies.

It was well known that an unusual quarry would be provided that day, and Master Macbeth had earned such a reputation roundabout as lent additional interest and excitement to the occasion. Lord Bucknam had insisted at first that those dangerous horns should be sawn off before the animal was "enlarged," since he had no wish to risk the lives of any of his valuable hounds; but this the Squire protested against; firstly, because he wished to preserve that splendid head intact; and secondly, because his idea of sport did not hold with this custom.

"If staghounds are staghounds," he argued, "let them tackle their game in its natural state, not mutilated and shorn of its defence to suit their safety, and make the animal an easy prey."

Still harping on the subject, he put forward as a further argument a reminder of bygone days, when Davis, on old Hermit, used to take Her Majesty's Buckhounds down to the New Forest for choice, there rousing the lordly denizen from his "harbour," and giving the royal pack a taste of the wild blood.

Alas, that those times are past! that the noble stag in its untamed state has been nearly exterminated in England, and except for a scanty few in the sylvan glades of Exmoor, the "merrie woods of England" know them no longer!

To Mr. Grayle's last remark his lordship replied,—

"That's all very well, Squire; of course when you hunt a warrantable stag from the forest you must take him as you find him; but you are not obliged to do so in a case like this, and I can't see the harm in clipping his claws to save my pack."

But Mr. Grayle was obdurate, and held out that Master Macbeth must be run as he stood, or left alone.

Eventually the Squire gained his point; but when old Job, his lordship's huntsman, heard the result of the controversy, he had strong misgivings as to the fate of some of "them impetshus ones."

In that equestrian crowd we may recognize almost all our old acquaintances. Talking to Captain Heffernan, who stands at her stirrup, is Agnes Grayle, looking remarkably well in the most perfect habit Wolmershausen ever turned out, and seated on a rakish-looking little chestnut—a Christmas-box from the Squire—with a first-rate reputation as a fencer, and a safe lady's mount. At this moment a groom brings up Heffernan's horse, a handsome hunter of the old school, with splendid shoulder, deep girth, short flat legs, and "well let down behind," displaying quarters that would jump you into the middle of next week; very different from one of those fiddle-headed, ewe-necked, tucked-up brutes, showing more daylight underneath than pluck inside, so common in the hunting-field nowadays, and of which class there are a good many to be seen on the present occasion.

Heffernan is very proud of the "Emperor;" he picked him up rather cheap at Tattershall's with a queer leg, but by judicious rest and doctoring the animal had come up as sound as a brass bell. Such a lucky bargain does not often fall to dabblers in horseflesh! He has mounted now, horse and rider both looking thoroughly business-like, and ranging up alongside his *fiancée*, he is pleased to hear her express undisguised admiration of the animal.

Lady Mountjoy has driven Sir Francis over in her pony carriage, drawn by a pair of sleek cream-coloured little ponies, with a smart tiger behind. "Dear Sir Francis," did not himself hunt, but her ladyship did (notwithstanding that she was "getting on"), and gloried in it; so, emerging from her wraps, she quickly transfers

herself from the carriage to her horse, which had been sent forward.

The Squire, Hector, and others, are all more or less well mounted; Mrs. Tewkesley's and Clement Mountjoy's animals coming rather under the head of less. The little Irish lady, albeit with a national keenness for hunting, only aspires to a fat, apoplectic-looking cob, more accustomed to eating its head off than going across country; and Clement's horse was just one of those fiddle-headed creatures alluded to, but a fair specimen of the Merrydale stables, where Hector said they never had a 'decent animal, which was true (if we except the cream ponies), for her ladyship's hunter was a very questionable beast, and quite unworthy of its plucky rider.

But we have no time now to discuss all the people and their individual steeds; we shall see what they are good for presently. Meanwhile Master Macbeth has had liberal law, and his lordship giving Job the signal, the motley cavalcade moves off.

The stag had been driven from his paddock and turned out of the park by a side entrance at a point where, if he faced the open properly, his line would take them over a good hunting country. His exit having taken place privately, Job now trotted away with his eighteen couples of splendid buckhounds towards the High Lodge entrance, there being a perfect swarm of unruly pedestrians and others, whom he was anxious to shake off. On getting outside the gates he swung round, and keeping along the park wall, left it to the pack to strike the proper line as they came across it.

When the procession passed the lodge, Lizzie Rolfe and her mother were standing in the trellised porch, whereupon Mr. Grayle stopped and spoke to the keeper's daughter, and tendered a gracious apology for the fright

the red deer had given her, adding that her assailant was about to pay the penalty of his misdemeanour. Hector, riding by his grandfather's side, and looking the *beau idéal* of a young English gentleman in his "pink" and otherwise faultless "get up," was pleased at this action on the part of the Squire, and gave Lizzie a look and smile full of meaning as they rode on.

"And what do *you* think of our village beauty, Albert?" inquired Agnes, drawing Heffernan's attention to Lizzie Rolfe as they passed.

"Very pretty, certainly."

"A sweet face, isn't it? The belle of Barringtrees, they call her."

"Nay, that can hardly be," rejoined Heffernan, gallantly. "But, of course, you mean in her own sphere." He frowned slightly, as if at the idea of a mere village girl presuming to compete with his future wife.

"No, I don't, indeed!" exclaimed Agnes; "and not only that, she is considered one of the beauties of the county by all who have seen her."

"Really? Well, too much admiration is bad for a girl in her position. I hope her people look well after her."

"They have no reason to be anxious about Lizzie, I assure you; she's a thoroughly good girl, and quite a pattern daughter."

"Then they are greatly to be congratulated," observed Heffernan, turning his head away as he spoke to adjust a stirrup-leather. "So much virtue and beauty are not often to be found in a girl of that class."

"I really don't see why they shouldn't be," returned Agnes, rather vexed at an almost imperceptible sarcasm which she fancies she detects in his words.

But further conversation is interrupted at this juncture;



for suddenly a deep note is heard in front, which in a moment swells into a melodious chorus as old Job brings his pack upon the line, and away race the eager beauties at a terrific pace with a breast-high scent.

Now the stag, on leaving the park, in spite of rattling of hats with sticks, and other devices to frighten him off, only condescends to trot a few hundred yards away; and on reaching a tempting piece of grass on the further side of a wood which hides him from view, he proceeds to take a slight refectation, not understanding why he should hurry himself. Presently, however, he raises his head, and sniffing danger with rapid instinct, again makes off with quick, jerky bounds, all-four-hoofs-at-once sort of action, accelerating these movements still further as the distant peal of music from the pack is wafted to his ears. A beautiful line he is taking now, and seems rather to enjoy the fun, not the least fearing to face the open; when, unluckily, just as he is going right away, he is "blanched" by some labourers in a field immediately ahead. He turns like lightning, and keeps almost on his "heel line" for a few yards; then, suddenly darting off at right angles, heads straight for the village, and leads the field such a dance as was not forgotten for many a day. On reaching the first cluster of cottages he hesitates for a moment, but suddenly appears to lose his head altogether, and dashes down the middle street at full speed, to the terror of all the old women and children, and the edification of a few gaping Hodges, who watch his manœuvres. As he gets level with the churchyard he takes the low wall in his stride, and has a little steeplechase on his own account among the tombstones—literally a steeplechase, since he seems to have an idea of seeking refuge in the steeple itself; but, finding no entrance available, quits consecrated ground for the



parson's kitchen-garden close by, and astonishes the old gardener's weak mind by flying over a huge cucumber-frame with an effortless leap. Coming to a very high quickset hedge, which formed the boundary of the parson's paddock, he quickly makes his "rack" through this, being very nearly caught by the horns as he does so, and re-enters the village at another point. He then continues his mad career along a row of cottage gardens, separated from each other by low fences, and executes a series of quick jumps over these, like a performing piebald at a circus, eventually getting among some farm-buildings, where it seems as if he would be stopped. Without hesitation, however, he clears a range of pig-styes, and lights right into the middle of Mother Mangle's drying ground, giving the old washerwoman, who happened to be there, a fit on the spot. Here he had again to make his "rack"—this time through a labyrinth of hanging petticoats, chemises, shirts, sheets, and what not, which he charges in gallant style, carrying off a baby's frock on one of his horns as a trophy. Tired, however, of such a cramped country as this, he leaves the village at last, and heads once more for the open.

Meanwhile the parish of Barringtrees re-echoes with the pounding hoofs which thunder along its thoroughfare, the impetuous farmers and country folk galloping inanely about, as if for their lives, on every description of cow, camel, and giraffe. But Lord Bucknam does not at all relish this sort of hunting, and anxious for a run, gives Job the word, who at once whips off the hounds, which are fortunately well together, and, quietly taking them down a bye lane, there waits till the "shirkin' varmint" shall condescend to run fair. Sundry scouts report at last that he has got well away; so Job lays the pack on again, and then, to all appearance, the run begins in earnest.

But this uncanny stag has not yet done with his eccentricities, for after giving them a merry gallop of three or four miles, he seems bent on suddenly committing suicide, and the huntsman, to his disgust, views him in the distance, from a high point of ground, making straight for the railway at a part where there is a deep cutting. Into this he disappears, just as a train comes tearing along, and Job, with a very un-Job-like expression, exclaims—

“Divil take the beast! Never saw a beggar run so unkindly. That cuttin’s half a mile long—safe to be smashed! What the —— did he want to let the ingine rob the hounds for!”

Not a bit of it, Job, not a bit of it! Master Macbeth is still as fresh as paint, and able to give the Great Eastern train a good start in half a mile and beat it, so he has no difficulty in showing the engine his heels and keeping his distance ahead. Of course, the moment he gets on to the metals—it was a single line—the approaching train turns him up the cutting, which, however, he quits as soon as he can, going away on the opposite side in promising style.

But Job is not at all inclined to emulate the lunatic antics of the hunted animal, nor does he mean to run the risk of the pack being cut up into sausage-meat before their time; so he whips off again, and lifting his hounds a little, skirts the cutting till the line reaches the open. Here he knows that the deer, if not run into by the train, will strike away to the right or left, and acts accordingly.

“Hark to Woldsman! That’s it, by Jupiter!” exclaims the old huntsman in delight, as he anxiously watches his hounds get on to the stag’s line again, and off that of the Great Eastern. “Not finished yet, my

lord," he cries, exultingly. "Worth a good many dead 'uns yet. Forrard there! forrard!"

And away they go once more, helter skelter over a broad common, studded with gorse; and all is plain sailing for a time.

"Wide through the furzy field their route they take,  
Their bleeding bosoms force the thorny brake;  
The flying game their smoking nostrils trace,  
No bounding hedge obstructs their eager pace;"—

But let us take a glance at some of these ardent sportsmen following; who, by the bye, have been rather thinned since they left the village. The Squire had dropped away some time ago, not intending to follow beyond a certain distance; but others, who did mean going, have been prematurely stopped from various causes; amongst these being Mrs. Tewkesley and the cob—the fat beast, sobbing as if its heart would break, having succumbed in a heavy plough some two or three fields back.

"Faith, Arthur," she cried to her husband, who had kept near her, "my poor baste can't go any further. But never mind me, you go on and keep your place."

"No, no, Norrie, we'll swop horses," replied Tewkesley, preparing to dismount. He was riding a hunter the Squire had lent him from the Hall stables. "You just get on to this animal. Come now, I insist; I'll change the saddle in a minute."

"Not for the world, Arthur, not for the wor-r-ld. I've had fun enough, raily. Bob and I'll get back quietly now. Go you on for any's sake, and don't let the other parsons cut ye down whatever ye do."

Tewkesley, it appeared, was not the only clerical sportsman out, and Norah was most anxious that her

husband shouldn't be out of the hunt, at least, so long as his brothers of the cloth were in it. He knew it was useless to argue the point, since they had had a very unselfish wrangle, before starting, as to their respective mounts, when Mrs. Tewkesley insisted on taking the cob; so he gave in, and with a kindly glance and smile at his good little wife, put spurs to his horse, which, being one of the right sort, soon made up lost ground.

Now Clement Mountjoy could not at any time be considered a good horseman; but on this occasion some devil seemed to possess him, for he rode as recklessly as Jack Mytton of old, and appeared determined to cut the whole field down, or perish in the attempt. It was not a very elegant process, however, since he had no more idea of riding than a tailor, and went at his jumps, arms and legs working like a windmill, with a loose rein, and a looser seat, only escaping a fall each time by the "skin of his teeth."

Poor old Clem! I don't think he would have cared to confess why he rode so hard that day—what powerful feeling prompted him to try and ride down, not the whole field exactly, but a certain somebody against whom he could not suppress an inward animosity, a jealous pang, which kept gnawing at his heart. It was all very well for his conscience to argue that this was ungenerous, unmanly; but he was little more than a lad, and although he fervently desired *her* happiness, it was impossible to quell a natural antipathy to the person who had come between him and *his*; and he felt all that agony which Young describes as

"The hydra of calamities,  
The seven-fold death."

But as a solution of this hard riding he might have put



it to himself *cui bono*? and the answer would not have been satisfactory. Perhaps he wanted to prove himself as good a man as his rival or better, in which case his calculation should have included the horse as well as the rider; or perhaps he desired that this interloper on the domestic scene should be knocked down and trodden into the plough for his pains—who knows? He could not have told you himself, so I am afraid I cannot; but I imagine many a man, similarly circumstanced, has felt that same indefinable antagonism, which he cannot suppress, and is powerless to act upon.

The unconscious cause of this emulative spirit on the part of Clement is taking it very coolly, entirely ignorant of the other's efforts to outride him. Sailing along on his magnificent hunter, with a light hand and perfect seat (the very antithesis of Clement), he smiles in amusement now and then at the frantic efforts of many of the field less happy in their mounts. Hitherto Clement had escaped his notice, but at length Heffernan's attention is drawn to his reckless riding, and he observes to himself as he sees him take, with more pluck than judgment, a post and rails with a wide ditch on the other side.

"By George, what a near thing! That young idiot will break his own neck, or his horse's, before the day's out, if he doesn't mind."

And it certainly looked as if he would in his futile attempts to compete with the well-mounted officer; for in these cutting-down tactics, whether rushing through a thick bullfinch, floundering over a double, or topping a bank, Clement adopted the same daresome, devil-may-care style of riding.

Meanwhile Agnes is going beautifully, easily holding her own at present on the wiry little chestnut, and



Heffernan, with a proprietary eye, watches her negotiate her fences with a cleverness which wins his cordial approval. Hector, too, as bold as Alexander, keeps his Bucephalus well in the front rank, but through all the thrilling excitement of that memorable run he never forgets his sister's safety, and is generally either by her side, or ready to give her a lead at the difficult places.

Soon after crossing the railway and getting beyond the common, the tremendous pace, combined with some pretty little jumping, had the effect of further reducing the field, and they might have been counted now on the fingers—the huntsman, master, first whip, a couple of hard-riding farmers, and a few of the Hall contingent forming the diminished total.

Lady Mountjoy, with a heart twice as big as her worthless hunter's, had been reluctantly compelled to give in at last; but, as the deer ran in a circuit, she had the satisfaction, with a good many others, of cutting in again before the finish. Clement, too, was about told out, or rather, his horse was, for he himself was riding a good deal faster than that animal could go; but determined to make one expiring effort to show his mettle, he rushed past Heffernan like a tornado, and charged a huge wattle fence and ditch in front full tilt. His fiddle-headed beast, however, never rose a foot, so they tumbled head over heels on the other side in a helpless heap; and while the horse flopped into the ditch, Clement was pitched several yards beyond, but fortunately on to a ploughed field, so he was none the worse.

"You went at it too fast, Mountjoy," remarked Heffernan, as his well-trained hunter carried him safely over, lighting close by the prostrate hero; "much too fast, and your animal's blown—not hurt, though, I hope—that's all right. 'Ware hoss! here, catch hold, or we

shall be out of it," he added, quickly hooking up the reins of the fallen steed with the handle of his crop, and passing them to Clement, who had only just regained his feet. The latter's mouth was too full of mud to thank him, even if he had not been almost choked at the same time by a feeling of mortification; but Heffernan never waited for thanks, and in a twinkling was out of sight in the next field.

This was practically the end of the run as far as Clement was concerned. He viewed his horse's heaving flanks with a rueful glance, and thought he had better give it up as a bad job; so, remounting leisurely, he dropped into a lane close by, and rode slowly and dejectedly back towards Barringtrees.

As I have said, the stag ran in a circuit, a very extensive circuit too, and few indeed were able to live with the hounds all the way. In fact, such a run for pace, jumps, and distance, had seldom been seen, and even our young friends, Hector and Agnes, were thrown out for a time—until the deer headed back—though Heffernan, on the noble Emperor, was able to stick to the line through every yard.

To many of the beaten field, who were scattered here and there all over the country, it was a welcome sound indeed when the distant music of the returning pack once more greeted their ears, and the excitement was increased tenfold when Master Macbeth was presently viewed making his point straight back for Barringtrees Park. It was evident now that the noble beast was fearfully distressed, and the hounds were lessening the gap between them and their quarry every field they went.

"What a grand old stag!" was the general ejaculation.

"He ought to have his life for giving us such a run,"

cried some one else, though the speaker had seen very little of it himself.

Some of the keen tag-rag and bob-tail, who had had plenty of breathing time, now cut in, and galloped madly off after the deer, as if each meant to take him single-handed; but fortunately he swerved to the right just then, and prevented these lunatics from crossing his line or getting between him and the pack.

And now every eye watches him, still in full view, as he nears the park wall—eight feet high if it is an inch—undoubtedly making as if he intends to jump it. Can such a leap as this be possible after the tremendous “bucketing” he has undergone? Scarcely. Yet he seems to think so; for as he approaches the obstacle, he apparently gathers his legs quicker under him for the attempt. But no—see! he falters! though only for a second; the next moment he bounds high into the air, and with a tremendous effort clears the wall and something to spare,<sup>1</sup> with one of the finest leaps ever recorded in the annals of sport.

Here he baulks hounds, huntsman, and everybody; though Job had played strict follow-my-leader since they got over the railway. But they are stumped again now, and the old huntsman, with the balance of his pack—for there are several absentees by this time—is forced to hurry round the wall in search of the nearest entrance. By this, however, they lose very little ground, and are quickly on the line again, which now leads them straight towards the lake.

“Taken soil, for a monkey!” cries Job to himself, as he catches sight of the water; and he is right in his conjecture, for as they reach the bank, the hunted deer is seen swimming diagonally across towards the opposite shore.

<sup>1</sup> *A fact.*

The eager pack, with a suppressed burst of music, dash in after him, and in a few minutes bring him to bay by the boat-house. But there is plenty of work cut out for them yet. The noble animal, with the water dripping from his heaving flanks, now places himself stern-foremost to the side of the boat-house, and with lowered head prepares to receive the onslaught of his foes.

Although he is sore distressed and almost exhausted, as evidenced by his panting sides and lolling tongue, he has not lost the threatening fire in his eyes nor the use of his terrible horns, and quick as lightning two of his foremost assailants are bowled over by a sweep of those deadly points.

"D—n it ! quick ! here, catch hold some one, quick !" cries Job, as he leaps from his horse and hurries across the bridge ; " this'll never do—Traitor and Harlequin stuck like pigs—best hounds in the pack—curse that horned devil !" and, without a moment's hesitation, he rushes round to the boat-house, and clambering on to the roof, which is fortunately low enough for the purpose, he whips out his hunting-knife and watches his opportunity.

Suddenly stooping over, he makes a dive forward, and seizing the animal by the antlers with marvellous quickness and dexterity, delivers the *coup de grâce*.

Thus ended the career of Master Macbeth and the wonderful run he gave for his life ; by some computed at fifty miles in length, though five-and-thirty would, perhaps, be nearer the mark ; at any rate, a memorable run, in which nearly everybody was enabled to be in at the death, and well worthy to be quoted, as it was, in all the papers, London and local, and as re-quoted at the heading of this chapter.

## CHAPTER XV.

"THE YELLOW FIEND!"

"Thou wondrous yellow fiend!"

*Davenport.*

"Accursèd jealousy!"

O merciless, wild, and unforgiving fiend!  
 Blindfold it runs to undistinguish'd mischief,  
 And murders all it meets. Cursèd be its rage;  
 For there is none so deadly. Doubly cursèd  
 Be all those easy fools who give it harbour;  
 Who turn a monster loose among mankind,  
 Fiercer than famine, war, or spotted pestilence,  
 Baneful as death, and horrible as hell."

*Rowe.*

MORE jealousy! Yes, with the reader's permission, this chapter will treat a little further on that familiar subject. Indeed, "the green-eyed monster," "the yellow fiend," or whatever he may be called, is rather a prominent character in this first part of my story.

"Thou king of torments!" "Almighty tyrant of the human mind!" the heart of the high-born gentleman and that of the lowly peasant are alike seared and torn by thy merciless, venomous fangs. Thus Clement Mountjoy and Allan Woodruff were fellow-victims—suffering under the same bane, though with widely different feelings, and under a different force of circumstances.



As I have said, Hector Grayle flattered himself that Woodruff had acted on counsel and held his tongue as to that romantic moonlight episode; and so he had up to the present, though more from a natural sulky reserve than from any caution inspired by threats; and as to the apology, that was not at all likely to be forthcoming.

The fellow brooded in silence for a few days, during which he did not see Lizzie Rolfe; but it was only the ominous lull before the storm, for the next time they met their interview was an angry one—at least on his part—and all the worst passions of the man seemed thoroughly roused.

This Woodruff, then, was now almost as dangerous a creature abroad as the late Master Macbeth had been, and was nearly demented by the racking tortures of the "yellow tinging plague." And what an unprovoked jealousy it was—what a one-sided affair altogether! Lizzie had never given him the slightest hope or encouragement to look upon her other than a friend or acquaintance; what right, then, had he to be jealous of her or her actions?

What right have scores of men, one may ask, to foster the all-consuming passion—where their ardour is only expended on thin air, and when such misplaced energy might be much more usefully applied?

After the stormy interview alluded to, Lizzie returned home quite terrified by the violence of her would-be lover; and on entering the cottage, found Mrs. Corcoran seated with her mother, sharing the warmth of the yule log. Observing her frightened looks, which Lizzie could not conceal, they naturally inquired the cause. After a little hesitation she was obliged to explain, though the name of Hector Grayle, in connexion with the affair, was carefully suppressed.

"That there fellow Woolly Woodruff's wholly crazed," observed Mrs. Rolfe, as Lizzie concluded; "mad as a march hare. Gideon ought to keep an eye on him. Sit you down, my dear, and have a cup of tea. Why, you're trembling all over like a haspen."

"No wonder, poor child," said Mrs. Corcoran, in a sympathizing tone; "a great rough brute like that, bullying a girl because she won't have anything to say to him."

"I'll give him 'what for' next time I see him," exclaimed Mrs. Rolfe, indignantly, as she poured Lizzie out some tea.

"What can make him so wild with you, I wonder," remarked Mrs. Corcoran, watching the girl's face narrowly; "are you sure you haven't jilted him, Lizzie? Are you sure he isn't jealous of somebody?"

"He can hardly think himself jilted when there has never been anything between us," answered Lizzie, evasively, her face colouring while she replied.

"Well, you know best, my dear," returned Mrs. Corcoran, who duly observed the sudden blush; "I merely thought perhaps you might have given him a little encouragement one time or another; just a little, you know, and then have thrown him over for some one else."

"Allan Woodruff has no cause to complain of my conduct towards him in any way, Mrs. Corcoran," rejoined Lizzie; and desiring to avoid further cross questioning, she added, "If you please I would rather not talk of the man any more; it quite upsets me."

"Just as you like, my dear, of course. Pray don't think I meant to be curious," said Mrs. Corcoran, with somewhat an offended air.

"Oh, not at all," returned the girl, hastening to con-

ciliate her; "and I'm sure I'm much obliged to you for taking any interest in the matter."

"Well, here comes your father, Lizzie," observed Mrs. Rolfe; "at any rate you'd best tell him all about it, and let him give that there Woolly Woodruff a talking to," and Gideon entered the cottage while his wife was speaking.

Then Lizzie had, very reluctantly, to go over all the affair again. When Rolfe heard it, he was very angry, and vowed all sorts of vengeance against the underkeeper for daring to frighten his "sweet little rosebud;" and Woolly Woodruff's ears must have tingled at the old man's threats and indignation.

It was getting late in the afternoon, so Mrs. Corcoran now took her leave, and, as she wished Lizzie good-bye, expressed a hope that the young girl might not be subjected to further annoyance. Mrs. Corcoran was an independent sort of woman, and whether she walked out in the daytime or at night, invariably scorned an escort, so she made her return journey to her brother's house alone, as she had come. No nervousness about her, as she averred to herself; *she* wasn't afraid of ferocious stags, or ferocious Woodruffs, or ferocious fiddle-de-dees of any kind. She was sure there was something at the bottom of this affair, though, which Lizzie Rolfe hadn't told them, and she should just like to know what. She couldn't tell why exactly, but her curiosity was aroused.

Now although Mrs. Corcoran boasted of her nerves, or more properly, the absence of them, and feared no mortal man, nor goblin either, she was certainly a bit startled, on drawing near Crutch Hut, at seeing a rough-looking fellow suddenly jump over the hedge just in front of her and bar the way. But she suppressed a little cry, which

nearly rose to her lips, and summoning all her courage, attempted to pass him as if heedless of his evident intention to stop her progress.

"Hold hard, mum, not so fast!" cried the figure, in a gruff voice, "I want to speak to *yow*."

"What do you want to say?" she asked, with a forced asperity in her tone. Then suddenly adding, as she caught sight of the man's face, "Why it's you, Woodruff, is it?"

"Yes, that *is* me; look *yow* here, missus, *yow* ha' just come from Rolfe's lodge, hain't yer?"

"And what if I have? Don't stand there stopping me with your impertinence, man; let me pass."

"Don't yer be in such an 'urry, missus; du *yow* listen to what I ha' got to say."

"Well, what is it?" Mrs. Corcoran thought she might as well hear both sides of the story.

"You're a friend o' Lizzie's, I s'pose?" Mrs. Corcoran nodded. "Then look *yow* here; du *yow* get back to that there lodge, and tell that there gal if she don't mind what she's arter, she'll be the death o' some one afore very long, so I don't deceive her. She'll 'now who I mean."

"And who *do* you mean? yourself?" asked the woman, thinking what a good riddance it would be.

"No, taint myself neither. That's my business *who* it is; Lizzie'll 'now."

She was right then. There *was* something or somebody else at the bottom of this affair.

"You needn't be so mysterious with me, my good fellow," she observed blandly, and wishing to pump him. "I *am* Lizzie's friend; but if I can be yours, too, I shall be glad. Come now, what's the matter? tell us all about it."

"It 'on't take much tellin', though I don't see what good yow can du if I du tell yer," was Woodruff's ungracious reply.

"Perhaps I can; perhaps I can influence Lizzie in your favour," she persevered.

"Oh, that be blarmed; not yow, missus. Her head's tu much took up with another party, to think of the likes o' me."

"You go to work too roughly with her, Woodruff. But who is this party that has come between you?"

"Ah, yow may well arsk."

"Won't you tell me, then?"

"Well, every one's like to know afore long, so yow may as well nayow for what I care. It's Mister Hector, that's who that is."

"What! Mr. Hector Grayle?" exclaimed Mrs. Corcoran, in surprise, becoming more interested when she heard this.

"Ay, Mister Hector Grile, and more shame for him, a playin' the fool with a young girl like that there."

"But how do you know, Woodruff? What have you seen or heard to make you think this?"

"Think it! I know it; I ha' heard enough and seen enough tu to show me; and what's more, that there gal loves him though he's only a foolin' of her."

"But how did you find it out? Was it when he was lying sick at the lodge?"

"No, no; since then. Though that's when they started it, I dessay," and Woodruff now proceeded to relate the particulars of that interview on which he had played the spy. "But he had better look out for hisself," growled he, fiercely. "He have got a desp'rut c'racter to deal with here, so I don't deceive him! Curse him!" he hissed out between his teeth. "*He wantin' me to beg his*



pardon tu—ha, ha, ha! or else I was to git a horse-whippin'—ho, ho, ho! ha, ha, ha! That's a good 'un, that is, ain't it, Missus?"

Mrs. Corcoran shuddered as she heard the man laugh in his savage scorn. He meant mischief; of that there was no doubt; and she thought it would be her duty to warn Hector Grayle at once of his danger.

Woodruff had called himself a desperate character, and he certainly looked it, with his lowering eyes and heavy scowling face. A difficult creature to conciliate under the circumstances; but Mrs. Corcoran made the effort.

"Now listen to me, Woodruff," said she. "Don't you go exciting yourself like this, and threatening people and so on. For that'll do no good. You bide your time, and it'll all come right in the end. Try a different tack with Lizzie, and don't be for ever growling and grumbling to her. That's not the way to make a girl like you. As for Mr. Hector, you've no right to talk of the young gentleman as you have," she continued, emboldened by Woodruff's silence, which she took for acquiescence or submission. "He means no harm, I'll warrant. Just a silly bit of flirtation, nothing more. Now, do you behave yourself like a sensible man, pray do, and you'll see Lizzie will come round after a little."

"Bit of flirtation, indeed! *He* mayn't mean more, darn him! but she does, and that's where it is."

"Oh, nonsense; it's all your fancy."

"'Taint all my fancy," cried he, making Mrs. Corcoran jump as he barked out the words. "I tell yow 'taint. Yow aint a goin' to git over me with yer soft sawder. Howsomdever," he added, in a calmer voice, "if you *want* to do a feller a good turn, and her too, p'r'aps, you might go and tell that there gal what I say, and that

she'd better mind what she's arter a playin' the fool like this here, or it'll be the wuss for her."

Saying which the amiable Woodruff passed on without waiting to hear more.

"Well, this is a pretty state of affairs," soliloquized Mrs. Corcoran, continuing on her way. "I wonder what Mr. Albert will say to it. I'll lay those two are really in love in earnest, and Woodruff knows it, or he wouldn't be so precious wild. The fellow's half mad, that's clear. I think I'd better go straight off to the Hall and tell the Captain what I've heard. He'll warn Mr. Hector; so I shall kill two birds with one stone."

"Hulloa! Good evening Mrs. Corcoran," cried a voice, as the woman was passing Crutch Hut, and turning, she saw Grumpy Grayle standing by his garden-gate. "I noticed you talking to that fellow in the road—" said he, "thought it was you."

"Good evening, Mr. Grayle. A nice fellow he is too, sir, that Woolly Woodruff. I've had a very pleasant talk with him, I can tell you."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yes. I think he's about as crazy a creature as ever I saw."

"Crazy, eh? Well he seemed all right as he passed just now. Touched his hat civilly enough and all that. Precious dirty hat it was too. Sooner *he* touched it than I did."

"They call him Woolly Woodruff, and I'm sure his wits are gone a wool gathering."

"But what has he been doing? What has he been saying, eh?"

"I should like to tell you about it, Mr. Grayle. Perhaps you could advise me."

"Certainly, if I can. But come into the Hut and sit

down," said Grumpy, opening the garden-gate for her. "You must be cold standing about."

Mrs. Corcoran gladly accepted the offer, and they disappeared into the house.

"Now then," said Andrew, as he made her take a seat beside the cheerful fire in the sanctum, "let's hear about this Mr. Woodruff. But first of all, can I offer you a cup of tea or anything?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Grayle," she replied, removing a fur tippet, for the room was warm. "I shall get home just by tea-time, so I won't take anything before."

Mrs. Corcoran then communicated in a few concise sentences all the facts relative to Lizzie and Hector, and Woodruff's consequent jealousy.

"So you see, sir," she remarked, in conclusion, "he's got some reason for his craziness. Some method in his madness, as a body may say, and it's a funny affair altogether."

Grumpy Grayle had listened attentively meanwhile, stroking the black cat with a continuous motion, which drew out the electricity, and kept up a running accompaniment of crackling sparks. When the woman ceased speaking he merely gave vent to a prolonged whistle by way of reply, and was silent for a few minutes.

"A very interesting romance, Mrs. Corcoran, upon my word," he observed presently. "It strikes me it will lead to complications."

"So I think, Mr. Grayle," said she, thinking so even more than he did.

"That is if the boy Hector is serious. But I don't expect he is."

"I wouldn't be too sure. You see Lizzie Rolfe's a very uncommon girl—"

"An uncommon fine girl, yes; I quite agree with you."

"And such a face as hers is likely enough to make any young fellow, no matter what his position, fall desperately in love, and no half-measures about it."

"No doubt, no doubt. Well, if he has, it's a pretty kettle of fish. Wonder what they'll say at the Hall?"

At this thought Grumpy chuckled to himself, and drew out an extra volley of sparks from the cat.

"I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Grayle. They ought to squash the affair at once, I should think, before it goes any further."

"Yes, to be sure, to be sure; so they ought."

Grumpy fell a-thinking again. Was his prophecy coming true after all? He had said that boy would come to no good, and this was certainly a bad start. Just like his father, he supposed, fond of low company too; what could one expect? Here Grumpy paid himself rather a bad compliment, seeing that George Grayle had sought *his* company so much; but in this respect Hector had not followed in the footsteps of his father, nor run counter to the Squire's wishes by associating too much with his captious and sinister-minded relative; though they always spoke to each other when they met, and were on very fair nod-and-good-morning terms.

Lost in his meditations, Andrew Grayle did not address Mrs. Corcoran for some minutes, which that person took as a hint to go, and made a movement to do so.

"Steady a bit, Mrs. Corcoran," cried he, waving her back into her seat; "don't be in a hurry. About this fellow, Woodruff, then—you think he's really dangerous eh?"

"I do indeed."

"But in what way do you mean?"

"Well, I wouldn't answer for what he mightn't do—he's mad and furious enough for anything."

"Bless my soul! a nice sort of wild beast to be at large."

"Very. I thought I'd better go up to the Hall on my way home, and warn Mr. Hector."

"Well, yes, p'raps you had," observed Grumpy, abruptly.

"As to the other matter, Mr. Grayle, that's not *my* business, so I shan't interfere."

These were only Mrs. Corcoran's words; Mrs. Corcoran's intentions were quite another thing.

"No, of course not; still—somebody ought. I can't—no connexion with the shop over the way, you understand," said he, jerking his head in the direction of the Hall. "Yes, yes, they certainly should be enlightened somehow; and the boy ought to be bundled off abroad directly, or something of the sort—that is, if he isn't murdered meantime."

Here Grumpy smiled a ghastly smile, as if he didn't feel quite sure whether he had made a joke or not."

Mrs. Corcoran soon afterwards protesting again that she really must go, he politely showed her to the door.

"Well, good evening, if you must," said he. "Good evening—thanks for the news—very glad to have seen you."

"Not advisable to let *him* know too much," muttered Mrs. Corcoran, thinking aloud as she resumed her way; "besides, I must keep faith with old friends. It wouldn't do to mix matters up worse than they are already; and now to see Mr. Albert."

"Shrewd old woman that," said Grumpy to himself, as he closed the door after her; "she seems to take quite



an interest in the family. Dash my wig ! *are* things looking up after all, I wonder ?—who can tell ? " and in the sudden excitement of his thoughts, he went to the cellaret, and filling a sherry-glass with raw brandy, tossed it off with a smack of intense relish.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE HAUNTED ROOM AT BARRINGTREE.

"Blood hath been shed ere now, i' the olden time,  
Ere human statute purged the gentle weal;  
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd  
Too terrible for the ear: the times have been,  
That when the brains were out the man would die,  
And there an end: but now, they rise again,  
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,  
And push us from our stools: this is more strange  
Than such a murder is."

*Macbeth.*

NOTICE! Any person or persons (of nervous temperament) trespassing on the pages of this and the following chapter will be persecuted—by nightmares, horrible dreams, and other unpleasant visitations!

Having said as much, I feel I have only done my duty; for, on penning the above heading, some such warning occurred to me as being due to the gentler sex, since an author has no right to intrude a spice of morbid horror on those to whom it may be unacceptable. But the legend of Barringtrees is part of the family history, so far as the Hall itself is concerned, and as such must be duly chronicled.

A day or two subsequent to the events last recorded, it happened that Clement Mountjoy, who had as usual been out shooting with the Barringtrees party, found

himself completely weather-bound by nightfall, and unable to return to Merrydale till next morning.

The day, which had been anything but a genial one, culminated at sunset in a howling tempest of sleet and bitter north-east wind, so that the intrepid Clement, who was generally callous of all weathers, was prevailed upon to sleep at the Hall, in preference to braving the fierce elements.

Now the question arose where to put him, for Barringtrees was full of guests for the shooting and some private theatricals besides, which were in course of preparation. Hence every room in the house was occupied with the exception of *one*, which was certainly empty and likely to remain so, since nobody would have desired to sleep there; and Hector, rather than allow his friend to do so, offered to let him double-up in his own apartment.

This one exception was the grey room, situate in the old part of the house, at the extreme end of the left wing, facing the north, and better known at Barringtrees as the haunted chamber.

Connected with this bedroom there was a most ghastly tradition, which had hung over it for many years, and which had been handed down from father to son as a perfectly true story in all its horrible details. So much superstition indeed had been felt regarding this grey room, that the present Squire had often thought of bricking it up, with all its ancient furniture, just as it stood; but this had never been done, and consequently it remained a sort of skeleton in the Hall, and a special nightmare to any nervous people who slept on that landing.

That it had once been the scene of a frightful tragedy there was not the least doubt, and though this was long ago, the grey chamber still retained its ghostly character

or was supposed to do so, for like all such rooms in old rambling mansions, it gave ample cause for a thousand fancies, arising from the frequent strange and mysterious noises heard therein at the dead of night, peculiar, one may suppose, to any apartment so long uninhabited, and doubtless caused by a legion of hoary old rats personating so many fiendish hobgoblins.

There was a good deal of chaff that night in the billiard-room about this same haunted chamber, and Clement was twitted by some of the mischievous ones as to his want of pluck in not jumping at it for his sleeping apartment, since it was the only unoccupied one to be had. Hector, however, came to the rescue of his friend, and declared, whether Clement wished it or not, he would never permit him to pass the night in that mouldy old place.

Foremost in this chaff was Heffernan, who professed to look with extreme contempt on such schoolboy stories; and although he, as well as the others, had heard of the legend, he actually went so far as to offer to give up his own bedroom to young Mountjoy and sleep in the other himself. This was too much for Clement, and that reckless dare-devil spirit took possession of him again; the same rash heedlessness already signalized by his furious riding in the famous stag-hunt. He made up his mind in a moment. *He* should sleep there, and no one else. He would show them that he was no such contemptible craven as they imagined; and if all the incarnate fiends from the infernal regions appeared to him and sat on him till morning, let them! Sleep there he would—at all events pass the night—and nothing should prevent him.

"Bravo! well said, Mountjoy," exclaimed Heffernan, as Clement made the announcement and looked defiantly

round, meeting his rival's eye. "I never thought you wanting in pluck, 'pon my soul. That's right; break the spell and exorcise this wonderful demon, or whatever it is, and summon us all if you see it; let's have some proof that there is such a thing."

"Oh, it's a pack of nonsense altogether," interposed Hector. I am not at all certain that he really thought this however. "But the room is damp and miserable; besides, there's no bed or anything made up. I wouldn't let a dog sleep in such a place."

"I mean to do so, old man, if I have to sleep on the floor." Clement looked very determined as he said it.

"Rubbish, Clem, you shall do nothing of the kind."

"But I tell you I *will*," persisted the other; "please don't thwart me, Hec," he continued, in a whisper; "I really wish it, or I wouldn't say so."

"But why, in heaven's name?"

"I—I don't know exactly; I've a fancy to make the experiment, that's all."

"You're a funny boy! However, if you are bent on being thoroughly uncomfortable, so be it; at any rate we'll do our best for you, and tell the housekeeper to have some bedding and sheets aired; then if you think better of it by-and-by, you can. You obstinate old lunatic!" Hector added, laughing and ringing the bell; "but you'll have one satisfaction, if you can call it so, in knowing that you're the first person who has slept in that four-poster for years; at least, so I believe."

"And that ought to be an inducement," observed Heffernan, dryly; "but as to ghosts, who believes in such bosh?"

"Not I," cried Clement, with ineffable contempt; its only people with bad digestions who see such things, and mine's as good as an ostrich's."



"William," observed Hector, as the footman now answered the bell, "tell Mrs. Hurst I want to speak to her."

"Talking of ghosts, I remember a story of a friend of mine once," began Heffernan, "a Mr. Mulgrave by name, who made a point of visiting his stables the last thing every night to see that his horses were properly bedded up and so on, mindful of the old adage, 'a merciful man is merciful to his beast,' and not caring to leave everything to his grooms, whom he habitually mistrusted.

"Well, on one occasion, he went as usual with a lantern, which, as ill-luck would have it, seemed to be troubled with a spit in its flame that night and gave but the feeblest light, only serving to make darkness more visible. Thinking, however, it would recover itself in a minute or so, he made the best of his way to the stables, and, opening the door, began his usual nocturnal inspection. On reaching the second stall he was about to arrange the clothing of its occupant, which had become twisted awry, when suddenly he heard a deep groan proceeding from the further end of the building.

"He started for a moment, but attributing the sound to one of the horses, was about to continue his rounds when his attention was attracted by a dark indistinct figure standing behind the partition of the furthest stall, which he knew to be empty. Owing to the impenetrable darkness and the wretched light afforded by his lantern he could not at first define the outline of this figure; but curious to make out the shadowy offspring of his imagination, if such it were, he drew nearer, and raising the lantern, an involuntary shudder passed through his frame as the shape became more clearly revealed.

"Sure enough above the partition there towered a huge pair of shoulders, surmounted by a grim-looking head-

piece, on which was a slouched hat, effectually concealing the features.

“Knowing this was not one of his servants, from the stature and breadth of the figure, and suspecting some foul play, Mulgrave, who was far from a nervous man, took a step forward and in a stern voice demanded who the intruder was. Another deep groan, which sounded horribly sepulchral in the still darkness, was the only reply; and, beginning to feel rather uncomfortable, he repeated his question in a louder tone. A momentary pause ensued, and then there issued from the mysterious figure a mumbling sound, which gradually developed into a volley of frightful oaths, dying away again into indistinct mutterings.

“Mulgrave was now more alarmed than he cared to own, and the whinnying of his favourite mare close by him was quite a grateful relief to his throbbing ears. He waited for a few seconds and then called out in an angry voice,—

“‘Hark you, by the heaven above! if you don’t say who you are and what you want, be you man or devil, I’ll dash your brains out with this,’ and he seized a crowbar which chanced to be standing against the wall near him.

“Another awful pause, suddenly broken by a fierce guttural oath, and then deep silence again. The black monster never moved, but towered above the stall as if in defiance of the threat.

“‘Once more, will you answer me or will you not?’ cried Mulgrave, clutching the crowbar convulsively, while the cold perspiration burst out on his forehead.

“To this there was no reply, not even a groan nor an oath. The silence was only disturbed by the thumping pulse of the terrified man and an occasional movement

of the horses as they champed the hay or rustled the straw at their feet.

"Presently, as he watched, Mulgrave saw, or fancied he saw, this uncanny thing in front of him rising higher and higher above the woodwork of the partition. He could stand it no longer.

"Your blood be on your own head then,' he shouted at length, and hurling the crowbar with all his might, it struck its mark with terrific force, and in a moment the mysterious creature vanished.

"The horses snorted with fright and rattled their stall chains, while Mulgrave, summoning all his courage, rushed round to the empty compartment, and was there confronted by one of his own grooms in the act of rising from the ground.

"Whatsh the matter?' hiccoughed the man, in drunken accents, rubbing his bleared eyes as the lantern light fell on them, 'whatsh the devilsh the row?'

"James, you here!' cried his astonished master, 'why didn't you answer me? where's your companion?' he asked, looking round; 'by heaven! if I haven't killed him he shall be taken off to the police station at once.'

"Who, shir—where shir?' spluttered the bewildered groom.

"What do you mean by this conduct, fellow?'

"Who shir—me shir—I was only asleep in here 'cos I—' (hiccough).

"Faugh! you're drunk, you scoundrel!' exclaimed Mulgrave, thoroughly angry, though still mystified; 'but where is that other fellow who was with you just now? Look, there he lies! pick him up at once; do you hear me, James? serve him right if I *have* killed him.'

"What other fellow, shir? no one else here, shir,' and

James began to get a little sober, looking round him as if dazed by his master's words.

"That gentleman now lowered the lantern, and there, to his intense disgust, though subsequent amusement, discovered lying on the ground with the crowbar across it, the cause of this extraordinary apparition.

"Propped up against the stall partition had been a hay-rake, which some one had left there, and on which the groom had hung his wet overcoat, spreading it out at the shoulders over the teeth of the rake to dry it the quicker; and against this again, elevated on the bottom of a bucket, had stood the stable mop on which he had hung his dripping hat. The groans and oaths too came from this inebriated worthy in his slumbers, for James had been out on the spree, and coming home wet through, 'as drunk as a lord,' had just instinct enough to hang his moist clothes in this fashion, and then dropped down to sleep beneath the bogey which he had thus unconsciously raised up for his master's benefit.

"I never heard whether James got the sack or not; but my friend Mulgrave always tells this ghost story against himself with a good hearty laugh at his own expense."

"A capital story too!" exclaimed Hector; "another proof of the absurd fallacy regarding supernaturalism."

"Of course," observed Heffernan; "nightly shadows and sounds may be turned into any sort of horrible apparition by a too vivid imagination and late suppers. At the same time, I think my friend had some reason to be in a funk. I should have been. What do you say, Mountjoy?"

"Can't tell, I'm sure, unless I was tried; but I'll let you know in the morning how I've slept in the haunted room," said Clement, smiling in self-confidence of his own courage.



Finding he was more than ever fixed in his determination, Hector duly gave Mrs. Hurst instructions to prepare the grey chamber for him; very much to the housekeeper's surprise, apparently, for she hesitated and said,—

“Lor, Mr. Hector, you're joking. Mr. Mountjoy don't mean to sleep there, surely?”

“He does, and prefers it; *he's* not afraid of all the silly stories about the room, Mrs. Hurst. Besides, there is nowhere else to put him.”

“Couldn't I make up a bed for him on your floor, sir?” urged the housekeeper.

“No; he won't have it. He seems quite bent on sleeping in the grey room, and I can't dissuade him.”

“Curious taste, I must say, sir. Lor! I wouldn't if it was ever so; no, not if you were to give me all Barringtrees.”

“Well, never mind, Mrs. Hurst; just have it prepared. Mr. Clement is not nervous; so there's no need to be alarmed about him. If he *were* afraid, it would be different, as he might fancy all sorts of things; but in reality there's nothing there to hurt any one. The idea is absurd.”

“I don't believe you think that, all the same, Mr. Hector. However, you say you want the room got ready, so I'll go and see to it;” whereupon the housekeeper hurried off to give the necessary orders. It was getting late, and she did not relish the job at all, requiring all her staff of housemaids to accompany her to the dreaded apartment. However, it was soon done; and after the fire got up a bit, the ghostly haunt looked quite snug and cheerful.

When the gentlemen from the billiard-room went upstairs it was just on the stroke of midnight, and the ladies had retired some time before. Of course, the male party were curious to see this wonderful chamber under its new



aspect ; so thither they repaired, one and all, and Clements had no lack of an escort to his weird roosting-place.

Then, amid jokes and laughter, these convivial spirits proceeded to make a general search ; under the four-post bed, on the top of its canopy, into the wardrobe and cupboards, and everywhere they could think of. But, finding nothing out of the common, they went off, rather disappointed perhaps, to their respective beds. Hector, however, remained to have a final pipe with his friend before he turned in, just to give him confidence, as he said laughingly ; and these two sat, cosily smoking and chatting together, by the roaring fire for some time, having apparently dismissed from their minds the lately absorbing topic relative to supernatural lore.

It was Hector's object to send his friend to bed with an unwarped imagination ; but Clement seemed determined to frustrate this object, and returned to the charge presently, remarking,—

"I dare say you wonder, Hec, what made me so determined to sleep here."

"Your usual pigheadedness, I suppose, old boy," replied Hector, smiling.

"Not a bit of it. I'll tell you, then. If there is one man in this world who aggravates me by his calm sneering manner, it's that fellow Heffernan."

"Really ? Well, I can't see that."

"No, I daresay not ; and far be it from me to speak slightly of your future brother-in-law. But I can't help saying it—he does aggravate me ; and he does it, too, in such a pleasant, good-humoured sort of way, which makes it worse."

Hector could not quite make out what Clement meant by this ; but had he known the secret of his friend's

heart, he might have understood better. With all their confidences, however, young Mountjoy had not confided his latent love; and on the other hand, too, Agnes had kept her own counsel; so Hector was quite in the dark.

"Couldn't you see what he was driving at?" continued Clement; "couldn't you see, with all his chaff and joking, he was *daring* me to sleep in this haunted room?"

"'Pon my soul I couldn't."

Nor any one else. Such was the influence of that "deadly venom." Clement Mountjoy knew he hated Heffernan, and fancied the feeling was reciprocal.

"Well, never mind, *I* could," he continued, filling a fresh pipe. "Now tell me, do you really believe there's any ground for the superstition about it?"

As he spoke, he glanced round the room inquisitively, and up at the ceiling, as if searching for the ground there.

"Certainly not," returned Hector, contemptuously, "except in the fact of there being a lot of old rats."

"But there *is* a legend, of course; I know that," resumed the other, puffing away up into the chimney, "only I heard it so long ago I've forgotten all about it."

"A very good thing too."

"On the contrary, when there *is* such a thing connected with a place where a fellow is going to sleep, one likes to know what it is, to prepare for the worst; so I shouldn't mind hearing it again. Suppose you refresh my memory with the particulars;" and he drew nearer to the fire, with a sympathetic shiver, whilst the howling tempest rattled against the casement.

"What a morbid old fool you are, Clem! you evidently want to court the horrors. The story's creepy enough told in the daytime, in all conscience, but here at night,

and just as you're going to bed in the identical place—not if I know it."

"Why, you're as bad as Heffernan. What the deuce do you take me for? Do you think I'm an old woman to be scared by a stupid legend? But perhaps you're afraid to tell it yourself under the circumstances."

There was a tinge of sarcasm in this last remark.

"Not I, my dear boy; the story is pretty familiar to me—I've told it often enough, goodness knows—only last night too—"

"Yes, but I wasn't here—"

"Well, it's getting awfully late," added Hector, looking at his watch, with a yawn; "but if you *will* have it, it must be in a condensed form.

"You must know, then, that it was in my great grandfather's young days—I can't say for the moment how many years ago—when the tragedy took place in this house—that is, in this room—which gave rise to the Barringtrees legend; but it had nothing whatever to do with any of our own family, and I am thankful to think there is no such blot on our escutcheon.

"My ancestor, it appears, had only been married a short time when he was obliged to go abroad for the benefit of his wife's health; and as their absence from England promised to be a protracted one, he commissioned his estate agent to let Barringtrees for a certain period.

"Accordingly this was done, and the place was taken by a certain Sir Geoffrey Hendricks, a wealthy, middle-aged baronet, who had also been recently married. His young wife, Lady Linda, daughter of Earl Tremaine, was one of the loveliest women in England, quite the rage in London at that time, and a girl who might have married the highest in the land, for every one was at her feet.

"This, however, was essentially *un mariage de convenance*, since Lord Tremaine owed Sir Geoffrey a heavy gambling debt, which he could not possibly pay; and the baronet, by way of compromise, proposed for the Lady Linda's hand—the only compromise, in fact, to which he would agree.

"Lord Tremaine pleaded hard with his daughter—for he shrank from forcing her—and she, poor girl, to save her father's good name, consented to sacrifice herself, and become the wife of a man whom she could neither love nor respect. Such marriages were not uncommon in those days, and even in our present age more ill-assorted and more mercenary ones still are often contracted, although not, perhaps, on such a basis.

"Sir Geoffrey Hendricks was one of the most dissipated *roués* in town, an inveterate gambler and a hard drinker, and many a disgraceful orgy took place in this old house during his tenancy. A man of this kind, then, was scarcely likely to endear himself to any woman, especially when he and his wife went to the altar under such auspices; so it is not to be wondered at that Lady Linda's first feelings of mere dislike soon developed into utter loathing and contempt.

"Lord Tremaine was a constant visitor here during his son-in-law's residence, and he often introduced to Sir Geoffrey's circle friends of his own whom he chose to bring from town—a useful little pigeon, now and then, too, to be served up at the baronet's card-parties, promptly plucked, and let go again—but this was purely accidental, for his lordship's sole purpose was to give his daughter the benefit of some decent society other than Sir Geoffrey's choosing.

"Among these friends was a certain Hubert Ormiston, a handsome young guardsman, who had known Lady



Linda before her marriage, and had been one of her most ardent admirers. This was dangerous ground, then, for him to tread, especially under the circumstances ; and the old earl ought to have known better than to have thus brought the moth to the candle. Sir Geoffrey, besides, was really fond of his beautiful wife, after a fashion, and jealous of her to the last degree, since he felt she had no love for him. Even in the wildest moments of excitement during card-playing he would watch her narrowly as she shone like a bright star in his drawing-room—the very centre of attraction—a planet around which hovered many satellites.

“ In return for the homage which Ormiston had paid her before her fatal marriage, Lady Linda had cherished a warm feeling in her heart for him, not far removed from actual love, and now that they were once more thrown together, all the old sentiments in each were revived with renewed strength. In her unhappy married state, Lady Linda yearned for sympathy and a kindred affection, which Hubert Ormiston was only too ready to give her. Thus it came to pass that a secret *liaison* was established between them, congenial in its warmth, as it was glaring in its guilt. This intimacy did not fail to attract Sir Geoffrey’s notice, although the lovers put the strictest guard on every word, and look, and gesture ; but the incensed husband gave no index by his face or manner of the jealous wrath fast rising within his stony heart, and planted there by the unconscious wife herself ; for like Parisina, Lady Linda, in her slumbers, betrayed the secret of her guilt.

‘ Fever’d in her sleep she seems,  
And red her cheek with troubled dreams,  
And mutters she in her unrest  
A name she dare not breathe by day,  
And clasps her lord unto the breast  
Which pants for one away.’



"Then, as the cruel poison sank deep into the soul of Prince Azo, creating in him a relentless fury, which no feelings of tie or kindred could assuage—so withered the last spark of humanity in Sir Geoffrey's nature, already too far brutalized, and, 'more cruel than the grave,' he plotted for that guilty pair a stealthy and a terrible revenge.

"Night after night he watched those two single themselves out from the rest, and withdraw to a secluded corner of the room for earnest converse, and though apparently deep in his game of cards, they were ever under his searching eye. Night after night Sir Geoffrey staked higher and higher, and drank more deeply in proportion, and night after night he reeled off to his bed, or was carried there in the very last stage of intoxication.

"But still the bait remained untouched !

"Oh ! it was a cold, calculating, horribly villainous scheme, and it makes one shudder to recall it.

"Not a whit thrown off his guard by its failure at first, Sir Geoffrey continued his counterfeited excesses—for little else than toast-and-water passed his lips, cunningly provided by his valet whom he took into confidence—and never in his life had the baronet gone to bed so sober as on these occasions when carried upstairs by his faithful attendant and another, apparently the most helpless votary of Bacchus.

"One night when he had lain watching for some time, feigning a heavy breathing as in drunken sleep, he dozed off against his will, and so remained in real slumber for over two hours. But 'a jealous man sleeps dog-sleep,' and presently he awoke with a start and found his wife's place vacant in the bed beside him. With mingled feelings of rage and triumph, he rose immediately, and

hastily throwing on some clothes, snatched a dagger from his dressing-case, and stole on tiptoe along the passage to the spot where his suspicion led him."

"To this room in fact," remarked Clement.

"To this very room, which Ormiston then occupied.

"Sir Geoffrey cautiously tried the door, and, as he suspected, found it locked. He listened, but could hear no sound within, and he himself was noiseless as a serpent in every movement. True, Ormiston *might* have locked the door on retiring to bed, he thought; but as a rule men were not so cautious, and the fact of finding it secured helped to confirm his suspicion.

"Now, I don't know whether you know it, but there is another entrance to this room, a secret one, formed by a movable panel in a corresponding apartment on the other side. That cupboard, which we looked into just now, has a false back, which if you touch a certain spring (acting for either entrance), gives way to or from you, leading to the other room through a small intermediate space, whence runs a narrow staircase to the top of the house—at least it did once, but I believe it is now blocked higher up. In order to get in here, however, from that side, supposing this door to be fastened, you would have to go round and up another flight of stairs.

"Sir Geoffrey Hendricks was aware of this secret entrance, and lost no time in availing himself of it, which he was the better able to do as the other bedroom happened to be unoccupied. Stealthily he crept through the secret passage, and on entering this, his guest's chamber, had the grim satisfaction of finding matters as he suspected. There, by the faint light of a waning moon, which glimmered through the curtained window, he saw too plainly his guilty wife actually sleeping calmly by the side of her paramour.

"The furious husband stood over them for a minute, as if gloating on his own shame and their impending punishment. Then, with clenched teeth and gleaming eyes, he clutched the dagger tightly in his grasp, and, with the other hand, shook the sleeping Ormiston by the shoulder, crying in a hoarse whisper,—

"'Wretched villain! this is your return for my hospitality; this, then, is mine for your vile treachery; die, as you deserve!'" and he plunged the dagger once, twice, up to the very hilt in the breast of his struggling victim, who, in the vain attempt to ward off those deadly blows, only prevented them from proving fatal on the instant, thereby adding to his own punishment and the husband's revenge, by prolonging his fearful death agony.

"Lady Linda started with a frantic shriek as she realized the awful scene, but the fierce Sir Geoffrey in a moment placed his hand upon her mouth and held her down.

"'Miserable woman!'" he hissed in her ear, "'to die were far too good for such as you; but move hand or foot, or utter another sound, and I stab you to the heart!'"

"Paralyzed with fear, she remained silent and motionless, fascinated with horror at the sight of the writhing form beside her, weltering in his gore, and splashing her with his fast-ebbing life-blood. Meanwhile Sir Geoffrey strode across the room, and with his reeking dagger, cut down both the bell-ropes, which hung on either side of the mantlepiece, returning to the bed with them and exclaiming in a grating voice, suppressed by violent passion,—

"'You shall not die, Lady Linda, do not fear, but live in the shame you have brought upon yourself. Here, in this room, I leave you with the partner of your crime;

nor shall you quit the side of yon dying man until all eyes have feasted on your foul disgrace and his just retribution !’

“ So saying, despite her desperate struggles, the relentless husband bound her tightly with the ropes he had cut down for that purpose, and so fastened them to the frame of the bed that she could not stir. Then gazing pitilessly on his handiwork for a few seconds, and satiating his stormy spirit with this murderous revenge, Sir Geoffrey Hendricks left the room by the same way he had entered.

“ For a long time the wretched woman remained speechless in this horrible situation ; but the ghastly contortions of the body beside her, which touched her again and again in its spasmodic movements, recalled the miserable Lady Linda from a state of stupor to a sense of the dreadful reality, and at length, maddened by terror, her frightful cries roused the household.

“ Then the footsteps of servants and others were heard hurrying along the corridors towards the spot whence the sounds proceeded ; the pale faces, anxious inquiries, and awe-stricken whispers, indicating an anticipation of some fearful calamity, though no one could tell what, and little could they realize how appalling.

“ Day was dawning as they burst open the door, when a shocking spectacle met their view. There lay the murdered man in his last death-throes, the bed completely saturated with his blood ; and sitting upright by his side was Sir Geoffrey’s wife—a raving maniac now—tearing with her teeth, like a wild beast, at her night-dress and the ropes that still partly bound her, which, in her mad, frenzied strength, she had loosened, and uttering from her foaming lips such terrific yells as rang in the ears of those that heard them for long afterwards.

“ The matter might probably have remained for ever a



mystery, but that Sir Geoffrey Hendricks, under pressure of his valet's threatened disclosure, confessed, was put upon his trial, and acquitted on the plea of justifiable homicide—though I'm not sure that he would have got off so cheaply nowadays—and the unfortunate Lady Hendricks was afterwards removed to a private madhouse, I believe, where death happily soon put an end to her sufferings."

"And that's the whole story?" remarked Clement, as Hector concluded; "well, it is awful enough, I must say."

"The sequel to the legend is in the tradition regarding this room, namely, that the mad woman's yells and screams are sometimes heard in here at the dead of night, and that the ghost of Sir Geoffrey Hendricks pays it periodical visits from the tomb, when he goes to that bedside, and stands over it with upraised dagger, as if searching for his victims."

"Like all other traditions, I suppose, utter rubbish."

"Of course," replied Hector, with an involuntary shudder; "and now to bed, old fellow."

At this moment Clement's face assumed a startled expression, and he looked anxiously at his companion, and then towards the legendary cupboard.

"Hark!" cried he, clutching Hector's arm, "did you hear that?"

"What? I heard the rats, that's all," returned the other, smiling.

"Listen!"

And they did listen, but nothing could they detect above the storm outside except a spluttering jet of gas in the fire, and the occasional rattling and creaking of the window.

"Come, Clem, I tell you what it is—you're all on wires,



I can see. You shall *not* sleep here at all; you'll be having an awful nightmare, or a fit of some sort, if you do."

"Not I," replied Clement, scornfully; "I'm no more nervous than I was before you told me the legend; why should I be? But I certainly thought I heard a queer noise in that cupboard—a sigh, or something like it—and I fancied I heard it two or three times while you were telling the story."

"My dear boy, with this tremendous wind and that rickety old window-frame, you might fancy anything."

"Well, I should like to have another peep in there, at all events."

"Nonsense, there's nothing; we looked just now," rejoined Hector, determined to discourage the morbid fancy.

"Yes, but you never told us about the secret spring, et cætera; why didn't you?"

"Why should I? I didn't want to remind you of the fact at all, until you made me tell that sickening legend."

"I wish you had, and then we might have explored it together."

"No doubt; but I didn't see any use in your conjuring up a lot of phantasmagoric pictures in your excitable brain just before you went to bed."

"At any rate the mischief is done now; I know all about it, so I shall have a look into this secret passage, whether you will or not."

"Μη κλέει Καμαρίναν, if you remember your Greek," remonstrated Hector; "let the ghost alone to-night; come off to my room, and sleep there."

"Not I; here goes," persisted Clement, taking a candle off the mantelpiece and going towards the cupboard.

“ Oh, you obstinate old pig ! ” cried Hector, laughing, and poking up the fire ; “ well, if you *do* see anything, pull him out by the nose, and let’s have a look at him.”

“ All right, I will,” and the inquisitive youth dived into the cupboard, with his lighted candle held high above his head.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## WHAT WAS SEEN IN THE HAUNTED ROOM.

“What may this mean,  
That thou, dread corse,  
Revisitest thus the glimpses of the moon,  
Making night hideous?”

*Hamlet.*

“Avaunt! and quit my sight!  
Let the earth hide thee!  
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;  
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes  
Which thou dost glare with!

\* \* \* \* \*

Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves  
Shall never tremble.”

*Macbeth.*

It is a strange, unaccountable fascination, that craving after the indefinite horrible. How powerful the attraction afforded by even a mere suspicion of the supernatural! Like a weird Will-o'-the-wisp, it draws its victim on as by magnetic influence, producing the wildest phantasies of the brain; then, as the too willing mind yields to the unwholesome influence, the morbid spiritualist, passing in his fancy through that eerie land of shapeless shadows and unearthly forms, peoples it with the preposterous progeny of perverted imagination. *Omnium pestium pestilentissima est superstitio!*

It would be difficult indeed to analyze human nature with regard to such a subject, or to arrive at a satisfactory solution of the extraordinary problem, why some people seem to take a positive delight in frightening themselves out of their wits. I give up the task as hopeless. There always have been, and I suppose there always will be, some such weak-minded people in the world, though much of their folly has of late been happily unmasked.

"Let gold-bagg'd priests, from Ganges to Bermudas,  
The gospel preach, according to St. Judas;  
It is my opinion, if the truth were known,  
That earth pertains to man and beast alone;  
And neither saint, nor fiend, nor bright nor dark angel,  
Between the South Pole and the port of Archangel,  
Have any call, or leave, or will, or power  
To meddle with a mortal for an hour."

So says Bailey, and what rational person would not agree with him? Yet, paradoxical as the statement may appear, it must be confessed that there are several authentic cases where the strangest sights and noises have been experienced in certain houses, supposed to be haunted, which phenomena have, at all events, never been satisfactorily accounted for. But, as Bulwer Lytton writes, "My theory is that the supernatural is the impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant."

This common sense *rationale* might, no doubt, be beneficially applied to all such phenomenal mysteries, and explain conclusively, perhaps, what has appeared, until now, utterly incomprehensible. That is, if people would be content to accept such a view. As a rule, however, the pneumatologic proselyte much prefers not to be disillusioned; and where he clings to some family tradition,

with perfect faith, engendered more by habit than mental conviction, it would be idle to attempt to "lay" the ghost for him by any such matter-of-fact means as sound arguments or wise theories. Indeed such an office would probably be looked upon less in the light of a benefit than a personal injury.

Clement Mountjoy entered the cupboard, as I have said, and searching for the spring, which he soon found, he pressed it, and the back opened a little from him, as described by Hector. For a moment there seemed to be something pushing against it and preventing it from opening any further, but thinking that it only stuck from disuse, he gave it a violent shove and passed into the dark space beyond.

As he did so his candle was blown out by some unseen agency, and he scrambled back again into the room through the cupboard, pulling to the false back as he quickly made his exit, a good deal faster than he had entered. When he reappeared his face was deadly pale; but this escaped Hector's notice, as he was occupied with the fire, and his back turned.

Clement would hardly have liked to own it now after all his boasting, but he certainly fancied there had been something leaning or pushing against that false back, and which gave way as he opened it. He also fancied he had caught sight of a dark figure disappearing up the staircase; but feeling convinced that all this *must* be pure imagination and nothing else, he quickly recovered himself, and held his tongue for very shame.

"Well, what did you see?" asked Hector, with an amused smile, when his friend returned to the fire.

"Oh, not much," replied Clement, carelessly. "Only a horrid little black hole smelling very fusty."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Hector, taking up his candle.



"That's the real goblin smell. They bring it from the graves, you know. But now, we really must go to bed," he added, yawning again. "I'm dead tired, and shall be fit for nothing in the morning. Come along."

"Where to?"

"My room, of course."

"Not a bit of it. I tell you I mean to sleep here."

"Don't be a fool, Clem. Why can't you be reasonable?"

"*I am* reasonable. Do you think I'd sleep anywhere else now? No, no; my mind's made up."

"Oh, well, if your mind is made up, I suppose it's of no earthly use talking. I know what that means—that the devil himself couldn't move you."

"Well, let's hope he won't try," said Clement, with a grim smile, and thinking of the mysterious cupboard. "Anyhow, here I am, Hec, and here I mean to stay."

"Good night, then, you old double-distilled essence of stubbornness."

"Good night, old chap," returned Clement, in an off-hand tone, though all the same he would have given worlds to have detained him a little longer. "I daresay I shall be up before you in the morning."

He little anticipated in what way those simple words were to be verified.

"Then you are positively and unalterably determined on sleeping here?" asked Hector, finally.

"Quite."

"Well, once more *bon soir*, and pleasant dreams. Just think of five hundred sheep or so passing one by one through a hole in a hedge, and you'll soon fall asleep," added Hector, as he reached the door. "Good night."

"Good night." And Clement Mountjoy was left alone in the haunted chamber. Nervous? Not he. Never

less so in his life. Look at the way he glances round the room, with perfect unconcern, as he fills just another half pipe before he tumbles into that old four-poster. Hear him whistle to himself, with admirable *sang-froid*, as he pokes up the fire again into a bright cheerful blaze. Besides he is determined to re-explore that secret passage before he goes to bed—no very pleasant occupation under the solitary circumstances—and he is making up his mind to the self-imposed task, bringing himself to the sticking-point, in fact, with the heroism of an Achilles.

The storm outside appeared now to have increased in intensity—the impetuous borean blasts beating with ill-tempered gusts against the groaning casement—and it seemed to Clement as if the whole atmosphere were charged with frantic imps and demons, who clamoured from without to be allowed to enter and make a night of it with him.

Whatever may have been his inward conviction as to the existence or non-existence of such things, he certainly did not appear to be wanting in that animal qualification called physical pluck, for he very soon primed himself for a second visit to that strange cupboard, although he experienced an unaccountable misgiving of some disastrous result from the venture. No matter, he was pledged to pass the night in that room; and until he had satisfied himself by another inspection, he felt he could not get into bed, much less sleep. Accordingly, still keeping the pipe in his mouth for company's sake, he made his way again towards the cupboard, though scarcely with such a careless feeling at his heart as when he did so the first time, while Hector was in the room.

On this occasion the false back offered no resistance, which proved, he thought, one of two things; either that

something must have been behind it on his former visit, or else that it had been eased in its rusty action by having been once opened. With a quick pulse he stepped boldly into the passage beyond, and elevating his candle, looked carefully round. He even went up four or five steps of the secret staircase, and peered into the impenetrable darkness as far as the rays of the candle-light would reach, but nothing could he see to cause the slightest suspicion or alarm; and laughing at himself for having allowed his imagination to get the better of him on the previous expedition, he re-entered the bedroom with a feeling of intense relief.

Just as he closed the cupboard-door, however, a sudden noise greeted his ears, which rather upset his new-found confidence for the moment. Behind the wainscot, and proceeding as if from the top of the room, he distinctly heard a sound like something falling—bump—bump—bump—bump—down the secret staircase he had just examined. It seemed to reach the level of the floor on which he stood, and then all was silent.

For a brief space he argued and puzzled with himself what this could possibly be, suddenly exclaiming, as a bright thought flashed across him,—

“Psha! what an utter fool I am! nothing but a venturesome old rat, of course—attracted by my candle, no doubt, and jumping down the stairs from step to step.”

So, feeling quite satisfied on this point, and shaking off the “trammels of superstition,” he proceeded to divest himself leisurely of his coat and waistcoat, and then knelt down by his bed and offered up a prayer to Him who is in every place, beholding the evil and the good. When he rose from his knees, he felt infinitely easier in his mind than he had done since he first entered the grey room.

It was now getting very late, and as he wound up his watch the last thing before jumping into the funereal-looking bed, the Hall clock over the stables chimed the half-hour past two. For some time after he laid his head on the pillow he remained, with eyes wide open, watching the glowing fire till it got lower and lower in the grate, and then at length, thoroughly tired out, he sank into a fitful slumber.

How long he may have slept thus he could not tell, but suddenly he awoke with a violent start—why, he knew not—and raising himself on his elbow, glanced involuntarily round the room. But nothing unusual was to be seen, except the dark shadows thrown here and there by the expiring firelight, and he was determined not to let his fancy play him any pranks. There were his clothes tossed on to the chair, his dress shoes and socks lying on the ground near; there was the candlestick with his pipe in the tray—everything just as he had left it; what else did he expect? Not a sign nor sound of any kind to alarm the most nervous-minded.

Clement felt, however, that having once awoke he should not easily drop off to sleep again without recourse to the composing influence of another pipe; so, leaping from the bed, he returned to the fire, stirred up the dying embers, and refilled his briar-root.

What a delightful solace is that insinuating little smoke!—the cherished companion of a man under almost any circumstances. Whether in the moment of care and trouble, hard work and excitement, or merely apathetic indolence, how keenly does the true smoker appreciate the boon of the narcotic weed. It may be a species of vice, no doubt; but I must say I pity the non-smoker as a being ignorant of such soothing gratification to the senses, and only wonder how our ancestors could



have put up with snuff as the unsatisfactory substitute.

Having lighted his pipe, Clement got into bed again to smoke it comfortably with his head on the pillow—a dangerous custom at any time, not to be advocated for a moment. Whilst he watched the fragrant clouds curl upwards from his lips, wreathing in fantastic shapes until lost in the deep shadow of the canopy, his thoughts wandered far away from the sombre regions of supernaturalism to a bright elysium on earth—a little paradise which he had often and often imagined, where reigned a lovely queen with auburn hair, blue eyes, and graceful figure—in conception, the counterfeit presentment of some one we know already—now flown, alas! leaving that paradise a bleak and barren waste—never to return, never more to gladden it with her glorious presence. Oh, it was hard, it was very, very hard; and poor old Clem, with a tear or two moistening his eyes, and the lighted pipe still between his teeth, fell fast asleep to dream of his cruel fate.

The next time he awoke there was good reason for the violent start with which he did so, for a strong smell of burning greeted his nostrils, and he felt an uncomfortably hot sensation about his face. Then he saw what had happened; that the pipe had fallen from his lips, and set fire to the sheet just under his nose. Snatching up the pillow he quickly smothered the blaze, thankful that he had been roused in time, and vowed he would never smoke in bed again, especially in another person's house.

"Tut, tut," thought he, looking at the damaged linen with a rueful countenance; "one of the best Barringtrees sheets completely spoiled. What would Mrs. Hurst say? Never mind, he'd put it down to the grey-room ghost,



and show them all what a fiery monster he had had to deal with ;” then laughing at this little conceit, he turned over in the bed, and prepared to fall asleep again on the other side. This movement brought the cupboard under his view, and when he caught sight of it, just as his head was burrowing into the soft pillow, he raised himself as suddenly on his elbow again.

“I’ll swear I shut that door when I came out,” he muttered, staring at it as it now stood partly open. “I’m positive I did. Psha! crazy old thing! I suppose it came undone when I jumped out of bed and shook the room.”

Very likely, for it only fastened with one of those old-fashioned buttons revolving on a screw, which would slip its hold and release the door at the slightest provocation. However, this did not seem to trouble Clement much, and he dropped once more on to his pillow.

But no, it was of no use ; he could *not* sleep with that cupboard open. It was only a restless, fidgety feeling, perhaps, but the room did not seem comfortable with that door ajar, and shut it he must. So, with a shiver at having to jump out of bed again, he sprang across the room, closed the closet, and placed a chair against the refractory door to prevent its opening any more.

There was just firelight enough for him to see what o’clock it was by his watch. Five minutes to four.

“Well, I can take it out in the pillows for nearly five hours,” thought he, “before I need get up. Lor, how tired I am,” and tumbling in between the sheets again, he dropt off to sleep for the third time.

One can dream a good deal in a very little while, and before Clement had been under the influence of Somnus many minutes, the drowsy god’s prime minister had led

him through a wonderful labyrinth of scenes and adventures.

After various transformations, he dreamt he was a knight of the olden time; that a fair, golden-haired princess (Agnes) had been carried off to the enchanted castle of a wicked ogre (Heffernan), and that he, the brave knight, had flown to the rescue. At the castle gates there were the inevitable fiery dragons with the orthodox green scales, but these he quickly disposed of by handing them each a Spratt's dog-biscuit, besmeared with some deadly rat poison, of all which articles he seemed to have a ready supply in his wallet. When he made his way up to the castle, he found the ogre in his bowling-green, playing a friendly game of bowls with Hector, and all the rest of the Barringtrees party having tea out of doors under an old sycamore, with the princess doing the honours. Without the slightest hesitation, and scorning to take the cup of tea proffered by the princess—just as one bull-dog does when he sees another, he forthwith fastened a quarrel on the ogre, who, scorning to fight, referred the matter to the Squire, when, hey presto! they were all spirited off to the billiard-room at Barringtrees, where Heffernan, changed from his ogreish form to a respectable member of society in evening clothes, sat on a chair by the fire, and jeered scornfully at Clement, who was engaged in a game of billiards. Exasperated at length, he dreamt he suddenly chalked his cue in a wild manner, and aiming carefully at the centre stud of Heffernan's shirt, pushed fiercely and viciously against it, and sent his rival sprawling on to the floor, chair and all, with a tremendous crash. Then he awoke. The fall of that chair awoke him. What chair? good gracious! the chair by the cupboard, and the door open again—wide open now!

Clement was lying with his face still in that direction, but he did not spring up this time, and merely huddled himself together closer in the bed, feeling he did not know what. A kind of spell seemed to have come over him—a superstitious awe, as though some mysterious agency were at work—and at that moment a friendly cock crowed outside, as if warning him of danger.

The fire, now, had nearly died out, but a faint streak of dawn began to steal in through the window, and threw an uncertain grey light over the apartment.

What extraordinary fascination was it that kept him from moving? He had an instinctive feeling that there was some one else in that room besides himself, and yet for the life of him he could not raise his head to see. There was something, moreover, about the silence that was painfully oppressive, and the ticking of his watch on the dressing-table, some distance off, sounded like the ponderous pendulum of a cathedral clock. How he wished the chanticleer would crow again and break that awful silence! Where was all his vaunted courage now? What account could he conscientiously give of himself in the morning? Bah! he felt the veriest coward that ever breathed as he lay trembling there under the bed-clothes; but he should get the better of his foolish fear directly; he was resolved to conquer this craven spirit, happen what might; so presently, with a stealthy, almost imperceptible movement, he turned his head slowly, cautiously round on the pillow and there—oh, horror! looming between him and the door of the room, was just what he *knew* and *felt* had been there all the time since he awoke—a dark indistinct shape close by his bedside, apparently watching him, with deep cavernous eyes, which by the deceptive light he fancied glowered on him in malignant fury.

To say that he was merely frightened now would convey but the faintest idea of his sensations; his whole frame seemed literally paralyzed with terror, and a violent perspiration broke out at every pore.

He might well have expressed his dread dismay in the very words of Job: "From the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up; it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes—"

It was an awful trial for him, poor boy! and other persons have been turned crazy, or prematurely grey, under no worse circumstances.

That flesh-creeping legend and the tradition connecting it with the room he occupied, flashed through his mind with painful vividness, and he could scarcely doubt that the grisly figure he saw standing there was a visitor from the other world—the shadowy form of that ferocious homicide, watching grimly at his old post.

He dared not move again, but remained fascinated by the spectre: he dared not call out; indeed, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; his parched lips refused to articulate a syllable, and it was well indeed for him that they could not. When he made the effort once to cry "Who is that?" the words sank into a hollow whisper, like the tremulous mutterings of a dreamer. How long would it stand there? It seemed as if he had been watching it for hours already.

But at last it moves! It draws still nearer to the bed and leans over him! Terrified to death, Clement holds his breath, his heart palpitating fast and violently, and seeming as though it would burst through his ribs. He feels that he is gradually growing uncon-



scious—that in another minute he will lose his senses—the room even now reels round—the four-post bed heaves up and down like a ship at sea—his brain seems on fire!—when at last—oh, what intense relief!—that dreadful thing moves away again from the bed; and Clement, with pent up breath, gives forth a heavy, quavering sigh, checking it little by little as though fearing to bring the apparition back to his side. It was fortunate that it moved when it did, or the horror-stricken boy must have swooned; human nature could not have borne such a frightful tension on the nerves for another moment. Still he watches with staring, aching eyeballs, and watching, sees it slowly, noiselessly, glide further from the bed and make towards the door. Thank God! then it is going to leave him. Clement remembers he locked his door, but that of course will not arrest the progress of the phantom. Pray heaven it may not! He expects to see the shadowy form vanish through the panels—but no! it turns the lock with a grating sound, plainly audible and quite pleasant to the ear after the weird groping movements which have hitherto made the silence so terrible. Now it moves the handle slowly and cautiously—the door opens and closes with a subdued noise, and it has gone!

The spectral visitor once out of his sight, Clement felt a new man. The opening and shutting of that door seemed to have given him confidence. He drew a long breath, and wiped the cold perspiration from his face. What could it all mean? Had he been dreaming, and was this the nightmare of a disordered brain? No—he knew he had been as wide awake for some time as he was at that moment.

Then there was real ground for the fearful tradition, it appeared, after all—ample reason to call that apartment



the haunted room. But such an idea seemed to upset all rational theory; it seemed an outrage on common sense; yet how could he gainsay it after what he had just seen himself? Clement was utterly puzzled—mystified—dumbfounded; he could not and would not believe in spirits or visitations from the other world; but what other complexion could be put upon this marvellous vision? It was past his comprehension, true; but he was determined it should not get the better of his faith and reason.

These thoughts flashed rapidly through his mind, when suddenly a powerful feeling—some controlling influence—seemed to prompt him to get up, follow the shadow if possible, and endeavour to solve this ghostly problem, should it prove to be soluble.

“If it were done—then it were well it were done quickly,” Clement argued; so, giving himself no time for second thoughts, he rose hurriedly, threw on his smoking-jacket, and stole quietly out into the passage in the wake of the mysterious phantom. He felt more satisfied with himself now; this piece of prompt resolution redeemed, in a measure, his recent cowardice.

It was just light enough in the long passage outside for him to see a few yards ahead; such light as it was improving further on, where the dawn peeped through a skylight dome.

There was the uncanny shape, sure enough, creeping and crouching on just in front of him, and now and again stopping in its progress. Clement, still with a quick-beating pulse and trembling limbs, kept well under the shade of the wall, preserving the same relative distance between him and the dreaded object he followed. But presently its movements became so mystic, so strangely weird, that poor young Mountjoy felt a cold shiver pass through him, and almost wished he had remained in bed. The

unearthly creature, or whatever it was, kept looking back towards the end of the passage, and then bowing its head slowly and deliberately at each bedroom door on the landing up to the point where it stopped. What sort of manifestation was this? Was it cursing the inmate of each room, or what? To whom did it next intend to pay a nocturnal visit before retiring again into Hades?

At length it reached the last door but one from the further end, and then stopped, stooping down at the key-hole, as if peering in or listening. This was Hector's room, as Clement knew, and he crept quickly along under the shadowed wall three or four paces nearer, with an instinct of friendship greater even than Orestes could have felt for Pylades, since he seemed resolved to protect his friend at any cost, though it were against a supernatural foe. He knew Hector never locked his door, therefore was not surprised to see it stealthily open without noise or effort, and the phantom figure forthwith disappear. With his heart throbbing painfully from excitement, he hastened forward, and saw the door close as quietly. But nothing could stop him now; he felt convinced some horrible danger was at hand; so, pushing it open again quickly, yet with extreme caution—luckily it had been left ajar—he followed the retreating form into the bedroom.

The sight which now met his view made the blood curdle in his veins; and for a moment, but only for a moment, he recoiled in terror at what he saw, rendered the more appalling by the imperfect light. There, standing over his sleeping friend, was that very apparition of Sir Geoffrey Hendricks, with upraised dagger in his hand, preparing to strike!

But Clement never paused to think, nor shrank in human dread of the supernatural. Hector was in peril; his dear friend and Agnes' brother was in imminent

danger of his life; that was enough for him. So, uttering a suppressed cry of horror, he rushed forward, threw himself with frantic energy on the threatening figure, and pinioned its arms to its sides!

A fierce curse, a desperate struggle, and then Clement knew he had no ghost to deal with, but a solid, powerful man. He could not alone have held him long; but Hector, waking with the noise, and hearing Clement's cries for help, quickly rose to his assistance. Then, between them—the one lithe and active as a cat, the other with a strength lent by bull-dog pluck—they very soon had the mysterious assailant on his back, and the dagger—or rather knife—wrested from his grasp in a twinkling. The upsetting of the washstand in the struggle, and their united shouts and calls, soon brought Heffernan and others on to the scene; then, when a light was procured, the mystery was solved.

"Woodruff, as I live!" cried Hector, holding the candle to the scowling face of the intended assassin.

"Thank God I *did* sleep in that room, Hector! I was only just in time to save you!" was all Clement could ejaculate, while panting for breath from his violent exertions.

"By George! I must have had a narrow escape, I know. I was warned against this fellow," exclaimed Hector. "So, Allan Woodruff," he continued, keeping his knee on the ruffian's chest, while some one went for a cord to bind his dangerous hands, "this is your apology to me, is it?—this cowardly attempt at murder in cold blood! Ah! would you?" and he, Clement, and Heffernan held the villain down more firmly as he struggled to free himself.

There is little more to be said regarding that morning's work save that the whole household were quickly aroused,

when the police were immediately summoned, and on their arrival the culprit was taken straightway off into custody to await his trial at the next sessions.

Oh, ye infatuated spiritualists!—ye gullible ghost-seeing fraternity!—slaves of a base and foolish superstition (to call it by no harsher name)!—what would you not have given to have received Clement Mountjoy into your community at the moment when the apparition disappeared from his room, and before the mystery was traced to its natural cause—to have heard him recount the adventures of that awful night? It would, indeed, have been a red-lettered epoch in your history; a flaunting flag hung out in the cause of your credulity, and a rare triumph, indeed, for the disciples of “John King” and his spirit *mediums*.

Further particulars regarding this vile attempt at assassination were cleared up afterwards. The jealous fanatic, Woodruff, had at first no real intention, it appears, of carrying out his threat against Lizzie’s lover, nor had he laid any plan for doing so, or he would hardly have blurted out what he did to Mrs. Corcoran. This, however, was in the hope that she would go back to Lizzie and frighten the girl into accepting his attentions. True he *had* thought at one time of shooting Hector Grayle from some coigne of vantage, but abandoned that idea as too likely to lead to detection, since he never carried a gun, and would have been obliged to borrow one; and it was only afterwards, when the devil prompted the cunning scheme, that he determined to put it into effect, and thought he could do so with comparative safety. It seemed that he knew of the haunted room, and that it was never occupied; so it struck him directly that this was the very place to hide in at night, in order to accomplish his fiendish design. It was easy of access,



moreover, from outside, since there happened to be some trellis-work beneath it, which enabled him to scale the wall up to the window without difficulty. In order to open the crazy old casement he had not much trouble in forcing the framework, and bending the catch out of place. But even had he failed in this he would not have hesitated about breaking a pane of glass to effect an entrance.

Accordingly he concealed himself in the cupboard, not knowing then of the secret passage; but when Mrs. Hurst and the housemaids came in force to prepare the room for Clement, he was somewhat disconcerted, and began to bethink him of another hiding-place.

By the merest chance, however, he just touched the spring of the false back, and as it opened he saw at once where he could better ensconce himself. He took off his boots half-way up the little staircase, placing them and his billycock hat on an upper ledge to be out of the way, and it was the hat which Clement heard bumping down the stairs, Woodruff having let it fall by accident. These articles were found in the secret passage afterwards, as the man probably intended to return for them when his ghastly work was completed.

Clement was quite right about there having been something pressing against that panel when he first visited the cupboard, for Woodruff had been leaning there, trying to listen to their conversation, and wondering when they would go to bed. He had only just time to slip up the dark stairs out of sight (extinguishing Clement's candle as he did so) when the latter entered the aperture. Woodruff had cursed and fumed a good deal at that young gentleman's wakefulness, which had nearly prevented his making even the attempt on Hector's life, and



more than once he had opened the closet door to sally forth on his murderous excursion, when he was deterred by some action on the part of Mountjoy. It was easy enough to unfasten the cupboard from within by inserting the blade of his clasp knife in the chink, and with it pushing aside the button. At last he had almost contemplated committing a double assassination rather than be foiled, albeit his nature, maddened even as it was, revolted against the dastardly act of shedding another man's blood thus wantonly. But had Clement spoken or moved when he stood over him, he probably would have done so to avoid detection.

It was fortunate that Clement fell asleep when he did, for Woodruff's patience was fast becoming exhausted, and fortunate too that the latter thought he had left him sleeping when he stole out of the room. The ruffian had carefully ascertained which was Hector's bedroom from the window looking on to the park; and, in the peculiar pantomime that had attracted Clement's attention, he was then calculating the door corresponding with that window. He had not, however, taken into reckoning the possibility of Hector locking his door, but in this, chance had favoured him. Most of the above particulars came out in the man's confession after his trial, and he expressed at the same time a sincere regret for his villainy, which regret he desired might be conveyed to Hector Grayle, who eventually returned him a frank forgiveness. British justice, however, took a more serious view of the case, and Allan Woodruff was deservedly sentenced to seven years' penal servitude; he is, therefore, not likely to figure any further in the pages of this story.

By his outrageous act the fellow, of course, placed himself beyond the pale of pity; still one cannot help feeling

sorry for him. That powerful, raging jealousy which can at will

“Unsettle the calm brain,  
O’return the scaled heart, and shake the man  
Through all his frame with tempest and distraction”—

must have emanated from a strong love, fierce and uncouth as such a passion was. But many a better man than he has gone to the devil for a lovely face, and so it will be to the end of time.

Hector, very naturally, was deeply grateful to Clement for his plucky conduct in the affair; nevertheless, from the recollections of his own dreadful fright, which he did not say much about at the time, Clement felt conscious that he could not lay claim to being quite such a hero as every one thought him. But although he should never forget to the day of his death the awful horrors of that night, he felt thankful to God that he had been thus instrumental in saving the life of his dearest friend, and clearly recognized in all this the hand of overruling Providence.

“Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well—  
There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will.”

So, the dreaded grey chamber was turned to some good account after all; and as the superstition regarding it abated by degrees, it was taken once more into use, and became like any other respectable and well-behaved bedroom.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE VILLAGE SCANDAL.

“Spargere voces in vulgum ambiguas.”—*Virgil*.

WHAT a pleasant relief to emerge again into sunshine after the shadowy gloom of the last two chapters ! in fact, to rejoin the ladies, as I suppose I may say ; for I trust that “world’s witch,” curiosity, has not prompted them to run the risk of experiencing the “nervous agitation to which brave men as well as cowards are subject.”

As a sequel to the attempted assassination, Woodruff’s motive for such a deed naturally came under discussion, and this of itself would have been sufficient to throw light on the clandestine affair between Hector and the keeper’s daughter, even supposing no other agency to have been at work, besides village gossip.

But meanwhile Mrs. Corcoran had reported the matter to Heffernan, and he, in turn, had mentioned it to Gertrude and the Squire.

Although no one at present had challenged Hector with the rumours afloat, and he himself studiously preserved a rigid silence regarding them, he knew this could not last, and that sooner or later he would be compelled to openly declare his attachment to the girl, and be prepared to defend himself and her against all interference. No matter how deeply interested in his welfare were they

who did interfere, he felt he could ill brook even his mother or sister coming between him and his love. He said nothing, but waited for the cloud to burst, and was prepared to weather the domestic storm at any cost.

It was shortly after this discovery about Hector that Gertrude and Captain Heffernan were seated one day in the morning room at Barrington, engaged in earnest conversation.

"I cannot tell you, Albert," said Gertrude—she no longer called her future son-in-law by his surname—"I cannot tell you how this matter has distressed and worried me."

"I am not at all surprised."

"Of course if it were only a silly flirtation—though even that with a gamekeeper's daughter is derogatory to one in Hector's position—I say if it were nothing more, I should merely smile at such youthful folly. But I very much fear it is as you represent—that the boy is seriously and desperately in love."

"Not a doubt about it, Mrs. George; my eyes were opened to that some time ago."

"I'm sure I don't know how to thank you, Albert, for all the disinterested kindness and good nature you have shown in this affair."

"Nay, you mustn't give me credit for too much; it is only natural that I should not quite appreciate the connexion—the fact of my future brother-in-law being linked to a peasant girl."

"Oh, but we must never dream of such a possibility."

"Of course not, and it will be better to nip the affair in the bud at once, if we can; for it has already caused too much talk in the village and round about."

"But how are we to do that?" asked Gertrude, helplessly; "Hector is so dreadfully headstrong. It seems

the dear boy is always in danger. First he gets hurt out shooting; then a horrid man tries to kill him; and then he falls in love where he ought not."

"There you have changed the order of things a little; the attempt on his life grew out of his falling in love, and his falling in love grew out of his getting shot; altogether an unlucky sequence."

"Oh, how I wish I had never left his side when he was lying ill at the keeper's lodge," lamented Gertrude.

"That can't be helped now, Mrs. George; but we must go to work carefully with him. Leave him to me at present, and I'll see if I can influence him at all."

"Pray do, Albert; I'm sure you can if you try, and perhaps you may be able to advise Lizzie Rolfe as well; she is a good child, and would no doubt listen to reason. One can hardly be surprised at Hector for admiring her so much, I think, for she is certainly a great beauty; it's a very lovely face, I must own," added Gertrude musingly.

"Well, there I cannot quite agree with you," rejoined Heffernan, with the air of an art critic; "pretty, no doubt—too pretty, it seems, for your son's peace of mind."

"A great deal; wouldn't it be a good plan, Albert, to try and get her away somewhere? just for a time, you understand, to let them cool down a little?"

"Yes, I had thought of that; you mean place her in some situation?"

"Exactly; but it would hardly do for us, Hector's relations, to moot such a thing. She would suspect our motive directly."

"Quite right, though I think I might try to arrange it: coming from me, you see, it would not appear so obvious."

"Oh, very many thanks for the suggestion; if you



wouldn't mind the trouble, it would be *so* kind of you. Once get her away for a little while, and I have no doubt it will be a case of out of sight out of mind with Hector."

"We'll hope so, but there is a contradictory proverb, you know, about absence making the heart grow fonder, only I don't fancy that would apply to his case."

Agnes now appeared at the door, dressed in her riding-habit, exclaiming as she looked in,—

"I'm just going for a ride with Hector, mother dear; we shall pass by the town if I can do any commissions for you; only remember, I can't carry much on Rataplan."

"Thanks, my love, I don't think I want anything, and they are sure to be sending in to-morrow."

"Then you really can't ride with us to-day, Albert?" inquired Agnes.

"I'm afraid not," he replied; "I've a lot of letters I must write this morning, and I've put them off from time to time."

"Poor Emperor! he'll be so disappointed. I promised him a gallop this afternoon when I took him his lump of sugar."

"He shall have one to-morrow instead," said Heffernan, smiling, "and I'll make a match with you against the chestnut—two miles, owners up."

"What stakes?"

"A dozen pair of gloves to a new Lincoln and Bennett."

"Rather short odds; never mind, done!"

"Where have you been all the morning, my dear?" inquired her mother.

"In my boudoir; I couldn't sleep last night for thinking of that dreadful creature, Woodruff, so I've just been having a nap to freshen me up."

"Not without a fire in the room, I hope."

"Oh, I wasn't a bit cold. I lay like a warrior taking my rest, with my Marshall (and Snelgrove) cloak around me;" and thus paraphrasing the old poem, she was tripping off with a laugh, when her mother called her back.

"You absurd child," said Gertrude, "do be serious for one moment. I want to ask you something. Have you spoken to Hector yet?"

"What about, mamma?"

"This ridiculous love affair of his."

"Oh, you mean with Lizzie Rolfe. I haven't yet; but I will this very morning. I'm going to give it to him well. Lizzie is a great favourite of mine, and I won't have her trifled with."

"Ah, my dear, I wish it *were* only trifling."

"Do you, mother? I don't. I mean, you know, that Lizzie wouldn't get over it in five minutes, whereas Hector would, perhaps in less. What is it some one says about love being a woman's whole existence, and only a sort of little adventure in a man's. Isn't that it, Albert?"

"Really, I'm not sure. It's somebody's idea, I believe."

"And somebody knew all about it then? But trust me, mamma. I'll talk to Hector like a grandfather."

"And if you find he is really serious?"

"Oh, I'll soon laugh him out of it. Good-bye. We shan't be back before three, so cold luncheon will do for us." With which Agnes disappeared, singing blithely as she crossed the hall, and finishing up each bar with a musical call for Hector.

"Depend upon it she won't do any harm," observed Gertrude, as the singer's sweet voice died away.

"Are you sure? If she is so fond of this keeper's daughter, and finds her brother very much in earnest, she may be induced to take another view of the matter."

"Do you think so, Albert? I hope not."

"So do I, Mrs. George. But sisters are sometimes very weak about their brother's love affairs," he remarked, dubiously.

"Granted. But this is quite a different thing. A girl out of the village and all. Agnes would surely never be so foolish."

"At any rate you may rely on me to do all *I* can to further your wishes," said Heffernan, rising. "And as to getting the girl into some situation, I make no doubt it can be managed. I will go at once and see how the land lies."

Thus the conversation ended, and Heffernan shortly afterwards made his way across to the keeper's lodge on the all-important errand.

This business regarding Hector and Lizzie appeared to be a very vexed subject at the Hall just now; and as the theatricals had been postponed *sine die*, owing to the sudden death of a relation of Mrs. Grayle senior, they had nothing else to talk about. Even in the short space of time since Woodruff's committal, various vague rumours had oozed out respecting the affair, creating quite a scandal in the parish of Barringtrees.

At the same time that Gertrude and Heffernan were conversing together on the matter, the Squire and his wife were holding a conference in the study. As usual the latter was neither amiable nor charitable in her arguments, and it was as much as her husband could do to keep his temper.

"You say, Percy, that it's not like Hector to do anything underhand," remarked Mrs. Grayle; "but *I* say he takes after his father, and here is an instance."

"Nonsense, my dear, nonsense. You are the only person who thinks so, that's one comfort. No son could be less like his parent." And no grandson less like his grandmother, he might have added.

"Hector's quite as bad, if not worse, in my opinion. George would never have done such a thing as this. You call it no disgrace, I suppose, for a gentleman's son to bring about a scandal of this kind—to make desperate love to a parish girl, and place himself on a level with a low clodhopper?"

Here Mrs. Grayle snorted with indignation.

"How do you mean, my dear?"

"How do I mean? Why your grandson and one of your underkeepers, a common labourer, are sweethearts to the same girl, aren't they? At least they were till one of them was sent to prison. A good thing if the other could keep him company till he came to his senses. Psha! I've no patience with it all."

"My dear Harriet, you talk a great deal of nonsense," returned Mr. Grayle, still keeping his temper, however. "This affair is all exaggerated, grossly exaggerated. If it had not been for that mad scoundrel's conduct we should probably never have heard of the matter at all."

"Perhaps not, till the poor girl was ruined," she observed, significantly.

"Harriet! I am surprised at you. How can you talk so of your own flesh and blood? A boy, too, who is the very impersonation of all that is honourable and high-minded."

"Fair evidence of such characteristics, I must say."

"I don't understand you, Harriet," cried the Squire, rising and waxing wrath by this time. "I don't understand *your* character, I must say—" he continued, pacing up and down the room, "fouling your own nest

by such insinuations. I tell you this confounded affair has been made a great deal too much of, magnified as it has been by that villain's jealous rage. A little extra attention, perhaps, on the part of Hector, in return for the care taken of him when laid up at the lodge—or, to go further, a passing fancy for his little nurse, arising from mere gratitude; and all this hubbub to be made about it, forsooth! just because an infuriated blackguard like that fellow Woodruff chooses to take it as a personal injury to himself. Pshaw! There, that will do, Harriet," he added, stopping suddenly in his walk, and holding up his hand as Mrs. Grayle was about to speak. "I don't want to hear any more. I shall talk to Hector myself on the subject, and that's enough. You let it alone."

Whereupon he bounced out of the study without waiting for a reply.

The old man was very much incensed at the idea of his beloved boy being so maligned; and, to soothe his irritation, he lit a cigar, and strolled round the hothouses on his morning tour. This was a favourite custom of his when at all vexed or ruffled by his unsympathetic spouse. After the jarring wrangle, with which he was too often victimized, he found delicious relief in the fragrant silence of his conservatories, there to seek commune with nature's most delicately nurtured beauties—his favourite camelias, with their waxlike corollas, the ever-varied orchid, and other choice exotics, appearing to welcome the weary spirit in dumb eloquence, when colour, form, and perfume alike appealed to his grateful senses, and transported the mortal clay from earth to fairy-land. Surely it was enough that his son had gone to the bad without his grandson following in the same footsteps. But such an idea as this he scouted from his mind as an utter impossibility. He himself had no apprehension as to Hector's



future career, though bygone experience, bitter as it was, made him dread what the boy might be driven to do if his grandmother were allowed to interfere.

A more aggravating woman than old Mrs. Grayle never breathed ; and the Squire felt convinced in his heart that George Grayle's undutiful conduct and devil-may-care character were attributable in a great measure to *her* influence, added to that of his uncle Andrew. She it was who had made George's home intolerable, who had promoted discord and quarrels between him and Gertrude—though such quarrels were all on his side—and finally had caused him, in desperation, to forsake wife and family, and his wretched domicile, to seek a more genial existence alone in the wide world.

From the day George left his father standing by the breakfast-room window, after their stormy debate, up to the present time, nothing positive had been heard of him, beyond the applications for money to his uncle, and a sorrowful letter written to Gertrude in exculpation of his conduct, begging her forgiveness therein, but furnishing no address to which a reply could be sent. A few years afterwards, however, a vague report of his death had reached them, though this was unaccompanied by any particulars as to time or place, thus causing the indirect announcement to be all the more painful.

Squire Grayle had often and often mourned his hastiness, and the loss of his only son. He knew George was as proud as Lucifer, and as obstinate as a mule ; but he little thought that such pride and obstinacy would be carried to this extent, and induce him to give up home and family merely on account of domestic brawls. But, as I have said, the Squire conjectured, and rightly, that the mother's conduct was the chief incentive to the desperate resolution adopted by his son.

For some time the old man had advertised repeatedly for the prodigal's return, "when all would be forgiven," causing, moreover, strict inquiries to be instituted at several confidential agencies in London; but all to no purpose.

Of course poor Gertrude was inconsolable on finding that her husband had really deserted her; and when her grass widowhood was converted into a stern reality by the news of his death, her grief was painful to witness. Mr. Grayle spent many an hour trying to soothe and console his gentle daughter-in-law, and Gertrude believed her heart would have broken, and that she must have sunk gradually under the infliction, had it not been for the old man's extreme kindness and the God-given blessings of those two beautiful children.

With all George's faults Gertrude had loved him dearly, as only such a woman can love; fondly she cherished his memory still, hoping against hope, and praying her heart out to God to deal gently with her lost one, and bring him back to her once more. Often and often as she rose from her knees after these earnest orisons, a feeling almost of conviction sprang up within her that her prayers would yet be answered. Then as she clung to such a thought, which soon faded away into utter hopelessness, she sadly reflected how different it might be now, with George restored to her, and those dear children to draw them nearer to each other, making their lives happy, loving, and contented, in contrast to the cruel past.

But with all this great trouble weighing on her mind, Gertrude felt how much she had to be thankful for. Had not her darling boy been twice mercifully spared—once from a dangerous accident, and then again snatched from the jaws of a violent death, by the heroic conduct of his

friend? She felt it impossible, indeed, to overrate her debt of gratitude to Clement Mountjoy for that timely rescue, and loved him almost as a son for his bravery. Little did she wot of the indirect cause which led to Hector's providential escape, and how Clement, in his jealous love for Agnes, had been induced to sleep in that haunted room entirely through pique occasioned by his rival's raillery.

In a former chapter Woodruff and Clement were quoted as fellow-victims to the same passion, but how very differently that passion seemed to operate on their respective natures! Here, in the one case, was a jealous man all intent on injuring his rival; while, in the other, the jealous man was all intent on injuring himself, or at least, ever bent on placing himself in peril, since he first tried all he could to break his neck out hunting, and then did his best to frighten himself crazy by courting ghostly horrors.

But whatever the cause which led to his saving Hector's life, Clement was henceforth a hero in Gertrude's eyes, and she felt nearly as proud of him as she was of her own children.

The children in question were now riding side by side at foot's pace towards the town of ——, evidently arguing some important point, and Agnes' face looked a little anxious as she spoke.

"Do you mean to tell me, dear boy, that you really and truly love this girl—with all your heart?"

"With all my heart. Yes, Fay, that I do."

Fay was the pet name he gave his sister; not an inappropriate one, since Agnes was more like a fairy than anything else.

"And she returns that love? Ah, me! But, Hector, think—just reflect for one moment; what can come of it all?"

"I *have* reflected, very seriously; and though I know the future is wrapped in uncertainty, I can't help loving her just the same."

"Oh, I feel so sorry for her," exclaimed Agnes, with a sigh; "poor Lizzie! it will blight her life; it can only bring unhappiness in the end."

"There I don't agree with you; but you're not sorry for *me*, I suppose."

"Of course I am; but you are a man, Hector, that is so different."

"I can't see why. I'm sure no one, man or woman, could love more deeply than I do. I perfectly worship the very ground she treads on—there! I tell you that, Fay; and as to my love only bringing her unhappiness, it never shall if I can help it. We may have to wait, but I shall never change; and if my grandfather casts me off, and I have to beg my bread, I don't care—I mean to marry her!" He brought his hand down on his horse's neck with an emphatic smack as he said this, which made the animal jump and sidle along the road. "I mean to marry her," he repeated, with a resolute look, "whatever any one may say."

"You really do, Hector?"

"I do, on my honour."

"Well, dear, I hope it will be on something more substantial," replied the incorrigible Agnes, with perfect gravity.

"You are laughing at me, I see; if you can't be serious, I'd rather not talk about it any more."

Here Hector, a little nettled at his sister's apparent levity on so grave a subject, trotted on. She meant to try to laugh him out of it, but would not have offended him for the world.

"Don't be angry, dear boy," she cried, coming along—



side again with a penitent look, "you misunderstood me ; I meant the bread-begging business ; that wouldn't be very pleasant or substantial either, would it ?"

"I don't care ; if I can't marry Lizzie Rolfe with the approval of the family, I shall do so without, that's all."

"But what does she say to this ?"

"Oh, you may be sure Lizzie is far too good to act otherwise than with discretion and—"

"Yes, I am certain of that."

"She understands my sentiments perfectly, but will not agree to any engagement."

"Of course not ; she sees the utter madness of such an idea. Ah, well, you poor children ! I'm very sorry for you both ; but what is to be done ?"

"I don't know, I'm sure ; we're young and can wait, I suppose. There, Fay," he added, changing his tone, "we've talked enough about my love affair ; let's try something else ; yours, for instance."

"Mine !" she exclaimed, with a little comical look ; "I'm afraid it's very commonplace—all plain sailing, in fact."

"And Shakspeare says, 'The course of *true* love never did—'"

"Oh, the bard only writes that ; *he* didn't know ; he was never in love himself—at least not with Anne Hathaway, they say—besides there *are* exceptions, and Albert and I are going to prove the rule."

"But you've to wait a year, you know."

"Yes, so the little mother insists."

"And lots may happen in that time ; there's many a slip—remember."

"You *are* a Job's comforter, I must say, old boy ; a regular dog in the manger. Because *your* course of love is likely to run anything but smooth, you want mine to



do ditto. But you approve of my choice, don't you? you like Albert?"

"Of course I do. I think he's an awfully nice fellow; but I must say I'd sooner have seen you married to dear old Clem."

"Then why on earth didn't you say so before, one of you?" observed Agnes, demurely.

"Really, you're too ridiculous, Fay. I don't suppose you would have done it to please me, and I don't suppose Clement meant to ask you."

"Didn't he! that's all *you* know, Master Hector."

This to herself; and Agnes did look serious now, as she thought of that interview on New Year's eve—not with a mock gravity, such as accompanied her dry remarks, but with quite a sad expression for the moment.

They were near the town now; and, touching Rataplan lightly with her whip to make him break into a canter, she kept slightly in advance of Hector for a few strides, as if wishing to avoid further conversation on this subject.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Heffernan reached the gamekeeper's lodge, he knocked at the door, which was opened by Mrs. Rolfe; and not seeing Lizzie anywhere about, was rather glad, for he was anxious to try if he could talk her mother over first.

The old woman was rather taken aback by the visit, and wondered what it meant; then, wiping the arm-chair by the fireplace with the corner of her apron, she begged him to be seated.

"I've been intending to come and see you for some time," he began, "but have never had—had an opportunity before."

That was rather peculiar, considering that he had

passed the lodge over and over again; but he was obliged to make a beginning. Mrs. Rolfe muttered something about his being "kindly welcome," and still wondered.

"The fact is," he continued, "we feel we owe you—that is to say, I feel I owe you a—a great debt of gratitude."

"Well I'm sure, sir; and what for?"

"In this way, Mrs. Rolfe. You see, Mr. Hector Grayle is my very particular friend; and our friendship will be further strengthened soon by my becoming his brother-in-law. So you understand—"

"How, sir?"

"By my marrying Miss Agnes Grayle, to be sure."

"Lawk, you don't say so, sir! Why, I allus thought she'd took up with young Mr. Mountjoy."

"Did you indeed?" returned Heffernan, smiling at the bare idea of the ungainly Clement daring to aspire to the fair Agnes. "Mere gossip, Mrs. Rolfe, that's all. However, I only mention the fact so that you might understand my motive."

"What's that, sir, if I may make so bold?"

"I mean in the proposal I am about to put to you—in the desire I have to do you a good turn."

He seemed to be taking very unnecessary pains to beat about the bush to explain this motive of his. He might have spared himself a great deal of trouble. Old Mrs. Rolfe was the most guileless creature in the world, and never suspected anything below the surface; added to this, she was rather in the dark still as to the Lizzie-Hectorian agitation, although, of course, she had heard of the prevailing scandal—the nocturnal adventure in connexion with Woolly Woodruff.

"What I wish to say is this," continued Heffernan, his tone and manner being the very essence of philanthropy.

"As a small recognition of your tender nursing of my friend, I should much desire to render you some service—some little reward for—"

"Lawk, sir! I'm sure we don't look for no reward, nor nothing o' that. What we did we did out of love to Mr. Hector, and what's more, only our duty, seeing as he was laid up in our cottage."

"That's merely your modest way of looking at it, Mrs. Rolfe. You certainly deserve a reward—something more substantial than the trifling consideration bestowed already; and, as Mr. Hector Grayle's friend, I desire that that reward should emanate from me."

He was very pompous and stilted in his way of speaking, doubtless wishing to appear more impressive by dint of grandiloquence.

"I'm sure you're very kind, sir," said the woman, with a respectful curtsy.

"Now it happens that I have it in my power," he resumed, "to provide your daughter Lizzie with a very first-rate situation,"—he had not the least notion where at that moment, but trusted to find one,—“a situation agreeable in every way, with high salary, a comfortable home, and a kind mistress.”

"Dear me, sir! you don't say so! I'm sure that sounds beautiful; but, lor bless you! we wouldn't part with Lizzie if it was ever so; we poor old souls couldn't live without her nohow. Still Gideon and me wouldn't never stand in the gal's way if she herself wanted to go out and see the world. But here she comes; she can answer you better nor I can."

Lizzie Rolfe now entered the cottage. She had been walking round the woods with her father, as was her frequent custom, and her lovely face was blooming with health from the fresh air and exercise.

Heffernan could not help being struck with the girl's extreme beauty, nor wondered much at Hector's infatuation.

She greeted their visitor with a graceful curtsy, more like a formal bow of the olden times. Her mother at once explained the purport of his visit; and, Gideon Rolfe shortly afterwards following his daughter into the Lodge, the subject was duly discussed between them all.

Heffernan, however, very soon ascertained how utterly fruitless was his mission. Nothing would induce Lizzie to leave the old people, and nothing would induce the old people to part with Lizzie. He saw it would be mere waste of time to press the matter, so took his departure with as little outward show of vexation and disappointment as possible.

He had ignominiously failed in this experiment, but he was not the man to be easily baffled; so, on his way back across the park, he busied his fertile imagination with some other plan for nipping this unfortunate affair in the bud.

Gertrude's future son-in-law was quite a godsend to her in this matter apparently, persevering to a degree, and all anxiety for the welfare of the wayward youth.

As the wise Mentor was to Telemachus, so was Albert Heffernan to Hector Grayle; though the faithful counsellor at present only acted in concert with Penelope in the interests of her son, not having as yet taken the latter in hand personally.

He appeared to Gertrude as the most unselfish man she had ever known—a kind and sincere friend, and one who had her interests at heart, as well as the interests of the Grayle family in general; a man, moreover, who never seemed to think of number one, and who never minded how much trouble he took to please and oblige others.

Then the delicate way in which he absolved them from any obligation to himself! so like a perfect gentleman! Ah! her daughter Agnes was a lucky girl—a *very* lucky girl—to have won such a man for her future husband!

So gratified, indeed, was the confiding mother with all the virtue and excellence she discovered in this new-found paragon, that she began to think seriously of curtailing that year's probation which she had been so very particular about at first.

"I know what I'll do," thought Heffernan, stopping suddenly half way down the avenue; "I'll go and have a talk to Mrs. Corcoran, and see what *she* says."

Whereupon he struck off to the right, towards a side entrance into the park, which would lead out near Sickles' farm.

"Let's see," he added, glancing at his watch; "there's just time to look up the old woman before luncheon;" and he quickened his pace in the new direction.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## A PLOT TO CHECKMATE CUPID.

"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men  
 Gang aft a-gley,  
 And lea'e us nought but grief and pain  
 For promised joy."

*Burns.*

MRS. CORCORAN, then, it seems, was Albert Heffernan's mentor. Very handy things these mentors; it is so pleasant to have some one always to fly to for counsel and guidance.

Heffernan had evidently a high opinion of the old nurse's intelligence, or he would scarcely have consulted her on such a delicate matter as this; but she had already won his confidence by reporting certain circumstances that had come under her notice, and the whole subject had been carefully discussed between them.

He found her at home, as it was just the Sickles' dinner-hour, and as soon as they were left *tête-à-tête*, he plunged in *medias res* without ceremony.

"I tell you what it is, Hannah," he exclaimed, dropping into a chair, and bringing his open palm down on the table with some force; "we're in a fix—the plot thickens—this infernal business is becoming awkward."

"What infernal business do you mean, Mr. Albert?" inquired Mrs. Corcoran, composedly.

"Why, about that young fool over there"—nodding towards the Hall—"wanting to marry this blessed girl."

"You mean the keeper's daughter? Well, why shouldn't he?—why need you care?" she asked, in an imperturbable tone which was very provoking to him just then.

"Why need *I* care? You ought to know, I should think. I've told them I don't relish the prospect of such a connexion; my future brother-in-law married to a low girl like that—it's monstrous. Don't you see?"

"Of course, of course, *I* understand; but supposing young Mr. Grayle persists, and you find he's really determined to marry her; what would you do then?"

"'Pon my life, I hardly know. If I didn't care for his sister so much I think I should be inclined to cut the whole concern, and yet—"

"You would!" exclaimed Mrs. Corcoran, raising her black eyebrows, as if in astonishment; "well, of course that would be a sacrifice, but I'm not sure it wouldn't be wise."

"You think it would, eh?"

"Well, you know best."

"You'll agree that I've good cause to object to the connexion, haven't I?" he observed, with a significant smile.

"You're the best judge of that, too."

"I wish you wouldn't be so confoundedly sententious, my dear Hannah. Can't you give one a little advice?"

"I don't understand your long words, Mr. Albert; but if you mean by sententious that I won't say much, it's a good fault, isn't it? Don't you think it's as well I've learnt to hold my tongue?"

"Certainly; I always have thought and always shall

think you the most sensible woman living; that's the reason I consult you."

"To be sure. Well, my advice mayn't be worth much; but *I* say—get them apart—send the girl away somewhere—if you can't do that, send him."

"Just what I thought of."

"Naturally."

"And the very thing I've been trying to do. I have only this minute come from Rolfe's lodge, where I've been offering to get her into any situation she likes—in gratitude, you understand, for nursing my friend."

"Exactly—and she declined?"

"She did, promptly though civilly enough."

"The old people wouldn't let her go, I suppose?"

"She wouldn't if they did."

"Ah! those old folks are too fond of their only child to let her out of their sight, don't you see?"

"I suppose so; and the only child smelt a rat, I suspect, and guessed what my object was."

"How in the world could she?" asked Mrs. Corcoran, starting in surprise.

"I mean she thought I was only trying to get her away from Hector Grayle just to quash their love affair."

"Ah! precisely; and she wasn't far out, was she?"

"No. But I've another idea, Hannah."

"No doubt. You call me a sensible body, Mr. Albert, but I can return the compliment; I always did think you had *your* wits about you. What is the idea?"

"Well, having failed with the confounded girl, we must get young Grayle out of the way; that's all."

"Of course; that's hardly a new notion though, for I just now suggested it. But how are you going to manage it?"

"I've a capital plan, which I'll tell you. I've already

mentioned it to the boy casually, though I didn't think seriously of pressing the matter at the time, but I certainly shall do so now. However, to explain. You must know that my regiment is likely to be sent out to India before very long, maybe in a couple of months or so—at least that's the report—not in the usual order of relief, but because there's some disturbance threatening on the frontier, and we are next for service. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly."

"Now I think, with a little judicious influence at the Hall, I could persuade them to purchase the boy a direct commission; and with a little further influence at the Horse Guards, I could get him posted to my regiment. He's doing nothing at home—his mother and all of them are on tenter-hooks about this business, so I should think I ought to be able to work it somehow."

"It's rather a happy thought, I must say; but did you intend to go yourself?"

"Most certainly—to look after him; his mother will trust him to me. Besides, I can't sell out or exchange when my regiment is ordered on active service; but even if we were only going in the ordinary relief I shouldn't care to do so, as I'm at the top of the captains, and expect my majority directly; and by an exchange, you know, I should lose such a lot of steps. But I'm afraid you don't understand my military jargon."

"Yes, I do, well enough for the purpose, Mr. Albert. Don't you think, though, that his mother and the rest of 'em would be afraid of his going out to the wars?"

"Not if I calm their fears and tell them, which is probably true, that there's not likely to be any real fighting, worthy of the name—no danger or anything of

that sort. You see they understand the great importance of the object, and will jump at it; besides, his foreign service need only be very temporary."

"And what about the young man himself? What if he objects?"

"Oh, but he won't. I must be careful not to let him see my hand, of course. But he'll like the novelty of the thing, as soon as he can make up his mind; the prospect of a nice red coat, and a bright sword to play with. I can get him to do just what I like, I believe, for he's as weak as water, and, if properly managed, will be charmed with the idea."

"You fancy, then, that taking him to India will knock the spooniness out of his head?"

"Effectually, I should think."

"Let's hope it may."

"However, if he doesn't cool down very soon, I've another remedy; I shall make him fall in love with some woman out there. Young men are very susceptible in a tropical climate like India."

"You're a shrewd gentleman, Mr. Albert, and no mistake," remarked Mrs. Corcoran, admiringly.

"I am merely acting in the interests of the family I'm about to enter," he returned, in a dry tone.

"They ought to be very much obliged to you. Talking of India, I had a letter last mail from my son. You remember Joey?"

"I should think so."

"He was always a great admirer of yours, you know, Mr. Albert, and he often mentions you in his letters—says he should like to get transferred to your regiment, and be under you."

"I'm flattered I'm sure. Where is he, and how is he getting on?"



"He's at Brelly or Briley, or some such place, just now, but he says they're coming home directly."

"What is he in, did you say?"

"The Rifle Brigade, and he's just taken the lance stripe again, or whatever he calls it. The captin of his company died a little while ago, and he was his butterman—"

"Bâtman you mean, I think," observed Heffernan, smiling.

"To be sure, that was it, bâtman. Well, after the captin's death, he thought he'd try and go in for promotion again. Joe's getting an old soldier now, Mr. Albert—been a corporal a heap o' times, but he's always getting broke for something or other; rather fond of a glass, I expect, like his father. But I was going to say, this Captin Vickers—that was his captin's name—was wonderfully kind to him, and he liked being his servant best, I think."

"Vickers! what Vickers is that, I wonder? A friend of mine married a Vickers some years ago; he was in the service, too. I wonder if it's the same."

"Joe don't mention much about her, so I can't tell you what she's like; though he seems very fond of her and a little child of hers, too, which he writes about in his letters. I'm sure if he knew you was going out to the country, Mr. Albert, he'd be very glad, for he wrote to me not long since to say he'd like to volunteer for your regiment when his comes home."

"So he shall, then; you write and tell him. Bless me! why I recollect Joe as well as if it were yesterday, when we were children playing together. I shall take a great interest in him, Hannah, for his own sake as well as yours."

"I'm sure you would, sir."

"He always promised to be a strapping fine fellow ; I suppose you've never seen him since he grew up ? "

"I haven't, but he says he's the biggest man in his regiment a long way—stands nearly half a head over the tallest."

"Indeed ! By the bye, Hannah, I wonder if he has a good memory. Is his memory as long as his body, think you ? "

"That I can't say ; he remembers you, of course——"

"Yes, but I mean——"

"I understand. Well, I dessay he wouldn't recollect much about circumstances quite so far back as that blessed accident ; besides, he left us, you know, before then."

"Ah, to be sure he did ; that's lucky ; he's not likely, then, to increase the complication."

"Not he, don't be alarmed. You take him under you, Mr. Albert, into your company and look after him, if he volunteers. I know I can trust you to take care of his interests, can't I ? "

As she spoke she gave him that peculiar look with those black eyes of hers.

"That you can, Hannah ; he is your son ; that's quite enough for me. Now I must be moving," he added, rising from his chair ; "I'm afraid I've been keeping you from your dinner."

"Not at all, Mr. Albert."

"Very glad we've had a chat about this matter, though."

"So am I, and I'm sure I wish you luck."

"I shall see you again, soon, when I'll report progress—good-bye."

So saying, these intelligent people shook hands cordially and parted.

As Heffernan was leaving the little farmhouse, old

Sickles' moon face appeared at the parlour window, crying out,—

“Mornin', cap'en ! whoy, dear hea-art aloive ! ye ain't a goin' to run away like that there, sureli. 'On't you drop in and jest taiste a mite o' our Irish stew ? We ha' got a be-ewty a comin' up—and thin a glarse o' my ould home-brewed to wash ut dayown with, pry du now,” pressed the hospitable farmer.

Heffernan, however, begged very civilly to be excused, saying he was obliged to get back to the Hall immediately, so made his escape and returned thither in a somewhat easier frame of mind, notwithstanding his failure at High Lodge.

After Hector and Agnes came back from their ride, Gertrude questioned the latter closely as to what had passed between them ; but finding that the result of their conversation only confirmed her fears, she took the first opportunity of seeking an interview with her boy, the outcome of which gave further and stronger evidence still of how desperately and hopelessly Hector was in love.

The quiet, uncommunicative man, powerfully inspired by the tender passion, is invariably the most dangerous, and the most difficult to deal with. As the fluke of the ship's anchor sinks deep into the ground through calm and motionless water—swifter and deeper than when cast in turbulent seas mid the flow of a powerful under-current—so Cupid's shaft buries itself to the feather in the heart of the tranquil, steadfast nature, whereas it glances lightly off that which palpitates only with volatile emotions, and is rendered impervious to a wound by its armour of insensibility.

Hector Grayle's was just one of those placid, reticent natures, especially when under the influence of love—and this, as I have said, was the first time he had been under

such influence. *His* secret, then, which had only transpired by accident, would never have been extracted from his own lips; unlike the shallow-hearted babbler, who confides in every other person he meets.

He had often communed seriously with himself regarding the great depth of his passion, and was astonished to find the powerful hold it was gradually assuming over him. At first he even struggled against it, and tried to shake off the sense of absolute enslavement; but utterly failed, as many a stronger-minded man has failed before him.

Gertrude's conference with Hector being attended with no greater success than her daughter's, the anxious mother was in sorer trouble than ever about it all, and longed once more to consult her oracle, Captain Hefferman, as to what had better be done.

That gentleman had already reported the unsatisfactory issue of his visit to the keeper's cottage, so everything was now ripe for mooted his own scheme. With his usual tact and common sense he argued within himself that it would be better to again broach the subject to Hector first of all, and, by holding out bright prospects of glorious excitement and sport in India, so work upon his young imagination as to make him eager for this trip to the gorgeous East.

Hector, as was his wont, had been very gentle and considerate in his conversation with his mother, for he loved her dearly, and would not have given her a moment's pain for the world; nevertheless, he was very firm in his purpose, and talked so vehemently of his devotion to the girl, that poor Gertrude was quite overwhelmed, and could not argue with him a bit. *Amore nihil mollius, nihil violentius*; and when his voice faltered as he spoke of Lizzie, and he vowed and protested that

he was wretched and miserable without her, that he could never change, and so on, his gentle mother, on the point of bursting into a flood of sympathetic tears, very nearly gave in on the spot, and sobbed a blessing on them both. But the mentor was at hand, ready to come to the rescue ; and although he did not know then how dreadfully weak Gertrude had been, she confessed to him afterwards at their next consultation.

It was during those two or three idle hours of a winter's afternoon, when it is too dark to do anything out of doors and time hangs heavy on hand till the dressing-bell rings for dinner, that Heffernan and Hector adjourned to the billiard-room for a game.

Gertrude glanced up at them anxiously as they left the library—after having joined the ladies in “the cup that cheers, but not inebriates”—and catching Heffernan's eye, she gave him a solicitous look, which he returned by a reassuring smile as he went out at the door.

Ah ! what should she do without him ? thought Gertrude ; she felt such confidence in him now ; so sure that his influence over her troublesome child would be successful in the end.

While he played his game of billiards Hector was more taciturn than usual, and though his friend knew well enough what was weighing on his mind, he carefully refrained from touching on the subject. Heffernan was aware that it would be the worst policy to let him even suspect that there was any ulterior motive for the proposal he was about to renew, knowing how sensitive and suspicious these love-birds invariably are.

“By the way, I told you, Hector,” he observed, carelessly, during their game, “that my regiment was likely to be ordered abroad soon ?”

“To India, eh ?”



"Yes, there's some row brewing on the frontier, I believe."

"Ah, will you really have to go, then?"

"Certainly; but I should do so even were it optional, which it isn't. Anyhow, we're next on the roster for India, and should be going a little later, if we're not sent now."

"Have you said anything to the others about it yet?"

"No, I intend to mention it, though, before I go back to Aldershot."

"I would; Agnes and the mother will be anxious when they hear it."

"As I suggested the other day, Hector, what would you say to come out with me?" asked Heffernan, after a pause, stroking his long black moustache rather anxiously.

"Well—I've been thinking about it. But how—I mean in what capacity could I go?"

"As an officer, of course, and in my regiment. If you would like it, I really don't see much difficulty about it."

"Well, I don't know; *I* see a good deal," said Hector, doubtfully.

"How do you mean? You've just taken your degree at Cambridge, so the exam. would be a mere walk over; with a little interest we could easily work a direct commission for you, and get you posted to my corps into the bargain."

"Upon my word," returned Hector, "I daresay it would be very jolly, and I should like it, perhaps; but, as I said before, I don't know at all how it could be done; I've such a lot of things to keep me at home just now."

"He means that confounded girl, I suppose," thought his friend.

"There's all the shooting to be looked after," continued Hector, telling off on his fingers, "and the fishing, and the hunters—I'm quite the head stableman, you know—and then the cricket club, and heaps of other things."

"Bless you, my dear boy, they'll all take care of themselves. Shooting is over for this season, and hunting will be soon. But talk of shooting, by Jove! think of the big game out there all the year round; there's nothing in the world to be compared with Indian *shikar*; besides, 'home-keeping youth have ever homely wits!' as the immortal William says; not that *you* have, old chap," he added pleasantly, placing a friendly hand on Hector's shoulder;" but the glorious excitement and change would do you a world of good, I'm quite sure."

"I daresay you're right; I believe it would. But how long would one be away?" asked Hector, thinking of his love, and that he could not bear a separation from Lizzie for any indefinite time.

"Well, that depends on circumstances; if there's not much fighting to be done—and I daresay the war we shall wage on the frontier hills will be chiefly against the ibex, markhor, and other Himalayan game—you might get leave or sell out again whenever you pleased; perhaps before the end of the year."

"If that's the case, then," rejoined the unsuspecting Hector, "I think I *should* like it; in fact, I'm sure I should like it awfully. That Indian shooting has often made my mouth water, and I'd give anything for such sport as can be got out there. I suppose one wouldn't be tied down too much to the regiment?"

"Oh dear no, certainly not. Now, let me see," continued the matter-of-fact Heffernan, wasting no words, and anxious to strike while the iron was hot; "this is

the middle of January; if we do go—which is pretty certain, I believe—the battalion will be ordered out by the beginning or middle of March. That also depends on circumstances. At any rate you would have plenty of time to get through everything and be gazetted by then; or, if not, you could easily follow us afterwards.”

“Of course I could; though I’d sooner go with you.”

“And I don’t the least see why you shouldn’t.”

“But is there any vacancy in your regiment?”

“There is, or, I may say, there *are*, for we’re two or three short at this moment. They’ll be filled up directly, though, if we don’t look sharp.”

“We’d better make a move at once, then. But what induced you to think of this lately?”

“Really I hardly know,” returned his friend, in an off-hand tone. “I just thought it would be very jolly to have you with us, that’s all—to have some tiger-shooting and pig-sticking together, and all that sort of thing. The idea occurred to me some time ago—one morning when I was shaving, I believe. Bright thoughts often come to a fellow under the razor. Perhaps the contact of the sharp edge is contagious to the wits. You’ll find that out by-and-by, my boy, when the stubble begins to get troublesome.”

Hector at present only cultivated a silky little moustache, very much in its infancy.

“I wonder what my people will say to it all when we tell them,” he remarked, presently, nursing the project in his mind while they went on playing.

“You leave *me* to start the idea. I’ll put it judiciously to your mother and the Squire directly I get a chance.”

“We mustn’t frighten them, you know. It will be better to suppress any whisper as to a frontier skirmish just at present.”

"Very true, until they have got over the first shock of the notion. Now, Hector, seriously speaking, you're quite sure you would like to go?" continued Heffernan. "Pray don't let me persuade you to take any step that you are likely to regret afterwards."

"There's not much chance of that. I'm a fellow who knows his own mind, and doesn't take long to make it up about a thing. I may say it's quite made up now."

"That's right, then."

Hector, on turning the matter over in his thoughts, reflected that his absence in India would put an end to the idle gossip concerning him and Lizzie; and this idea, added to other inducements, had finally decided him.

The mentor was so elate with his success he could scarcely conceal his triumph. *Telemachus* was a good boy, but the crafty counsellor had scarcely expected him to fall into the trap quite so easily.

That evening he spoke very seriously to Mr. Grayle about Hector's infatuation, and suggested, first of all, that it would be a good plan, under the circumstances, if the Rolfes could be removed from the estate. This, however, the Squire would not hear of, saying that old Rolfe was much too valuable a servant to be dismissed in that sort of way, simply because he happened to have a pretty daughter to whom Hector chose to make love. Furthermore, he looked upon this vagary on the part of his grandson as quite a harmless affair, not worth serious discussion. But Heffernan shook his head with a grave air, and argued so strongly about the matter, that the Squire began to think there might be something in it after all; accordingly, when the project for getting Hector away from the scene for a while was explained, the old gentleman, contrary to expectation, and after a little demur, seemed quite to enter into it, and agreed in thinking that

the change would be a capital thing for the boy, and, no doubt, knock the nonsense out of his head.

"So far so good," thought Heffernan. "And now to tackle the anxious mother."

This he did with considerable *finesse*, and much well-considered persuasion, completely carrying Gertrude away by his eulogiums on the scheme, and the certain advantage that would accrue. His sudden announcement that his regiment was likely to be ordered abroad immediately, and that he intended going with it, took her as much by surprise as the proposal itself regarding Hector. She was naturally all anxiety at first, for her loving heart fluttered at the thought of her darling son going out to such a very hot and dangerous country. But then he would be under Albert's special charge, she reflected; so what need was there to fear? She felt she could place such implicit trust in him, and eventually the anxious mother's apprehensions were almost entirely allayed by the smooth silvery tones and repeated reassurances of her paragon.

Here was another instance of his extreme unselfishness and innate kindness, she thought. He would actually undertake to go to India at considerable inconvenience and expense, no doubt solely in the interests of her headstrong boy, and in order to look after him. Heffernan's absence, too, in this cause would, perhaps, involve a further postponement of his marriage with Agnes—for it was uncertain how long they might be away—therefore Gertrude was positive that this must be a great sacrifice on his part, and appreciated it accordingly. Surely such magnanimous conduct and such a generous nature were rare to find—very rare, indeed—and forthwith the mentor went up fifty degrees in her opinion. Nor could she congratulate herself enough on her daughter's future prospects.



Finally Agnes and Hector were taken into the consultation, and as every one seemed to be agreed on the excellence of the project—there being no dissentient voice, except a little grumble from Agnes as to how dreadfully dull she would find it without them—the resolution was carried *nem. con.*

## CHAPTER XX.

## . UNDER THE PEEFUL-TREE.

"A woman is like to—but stay,  
 What a woman is like, who can say?  
 There is no living with, or without one,  
 She's like nothing on earth but a woman."

*Hoare.*

"The stranger's general blessing  
 From sultry India to the Pole!"

*Ledyard.*

FROM Barringtrees to Bareilly, in the North-West Provinces of India, is a "far cry"—many thousands of miles—but in these days of advanced civilization, when rapid means of communication and transit bring distant countries within convenient reach of each other, an author has less scruple in suddenly transporting his reader far away from the scene where the main action of his story is laid.

Bareilly is a pretty little military station in the Rohilkund district, situate within easy distance of the hills (the Kumaon range), and on a clear day the blue line of the first Himalayan ridge is distinctly visible from almost any part of the cantonment. The station was burnt to the ground during the Indian Mutiny, but on its being rebuilt became a place of more importance, and the barracks which were afterwards erected for

the European troops are amongst the finest in India. The private houses, however, for the accommodation of officers and others, were constructed on a very different scale, and are, for the most part, mere huts by comparison—small, ugly, low-roofed bungalows, without any pretensions to architecture, and very little to comfort, forming a strange contrast to the handsome red-brick churches and the lofty barracks.

From a picturesque point of view, Bareilly is quite an oasis in the desert, and may well be called the garden of the North-West Provinces, for nature has lavished her favours here with greater liberality than on most stations situate on the Indian plains. There are many beautiful “topes” of trees studding the outskirts of the civil and military cantonments which give a wooded appearance to the scene, especially grateful to the eye after the dreary wastes of arid soil which prevail over such a vast expanse of country, approaching to, and partly surrounding it.

Like nearly every settlement on the plains of Northern India, although it can boast the most delightful climate in the world during the cold season—that is, from October to March—Bareilly is a perfect little *jehanum*,<sup>1</sup> to use the native term, during the hot months. But old *Quihais*<sup>2</sup> say it is worth while to undergo the grilling summer at one of these stations in order to appreciate more thoroughly the delicious change when it does come—when punkahs, “khus-khus tatties” and “solah topees” are put aside, and people are no longer cooped up in bungalows all day long, to go out at dusk with the owls and the jackals, or rise in the morning before the sun appears—but can take their constitutional (*howar*

<sup>1</sup> The infernal regions.

<sup>2</sup> Old Indian residents.

*khana ki waste*) at any hour they choose, as in the temperate zone.

After the sweltering heat of an Indian summer, welcome indeed to the poor dried-up, washed-out-looking resident, is that first cool breath of air, which heralds the approach of the cold weather and makes itself felt in the mornings and evenings, loaded with the fragrance of orange blossoms and other heavily-scented plants.

On such a morning, about the beginning of October—for I must go back a few months in my story—we will ask our *genii* to drop us down into the middle of the Bareilly cantonments. It is nearly seven o'clock, and a brigade parade is going on, as can be heard from the booming of guns, rumbling of artillery-carriages, firing of rifles, bugle-calls, and hoarse words of command, which sound sharp and clear on the fresh morning air, though the general parade-ground is some distance from the lines.

This is the first brigade muster of the season, and all the troops of the little garrison have collected *en masse*, consisting of one European foot regiment, one battery of artillery, a Native cavalry regiment, and a battalion of Native infantry. As they will not be marching back to barracks for some time, we will wait for them, and turn into the compound of a bungalow, which stands by the main roadside, up which road most of the small army will pass by-and-by when the parade is over.

The compound, that is, the enclosed land immediately surrounding this bungalow, is more attractive than the generality of such grounds, and is rendered cool, shady, and pleasant, by some large trees and shrubs, and a frantic attempt to cultivate a garden, which, favoured by the rich Bareilly soil, is just beginning to show itself to advantage.

A prominent feature in the compound is a stately

peepul-tree, which grows in dangerous proximity to the bungalow and its out-houses, or "go-downs," close at hand, threatening very shortly to demolish the whole of the buildings in its wide-spreading clutch, as with those tenacious roots it feels its way under the flimsy foundation, slowly and surely undermining it and rearing from the ruins a family of young peepul-trees in defiance of every effort to prevent their growth.

To explain the extraordinary nature of the peepul, if I may be excused for a moment's digression, I will quote an authority on the subject, who says, "No wonder that superstition should have consecrated this tree, delicate and beautiful as it is, to the gods. The palace, the castle, the temple, and the tomb—all those works which man is most proud to raise, to spread, and to perpetuate his name—crumble to dust beneath her withering grasp. She rises triumphant over them all in her lofty beauty, bearing high in the air, amidst her light green foliage, fragments of the wreck she has made, to show the nothingness of man's efforts." And another writer describes it as springing up "in most extraordinary places, and often to the great detriment of public buildings, growing out of the cement which connects stones and bricks, and by the violence of its pressure gradually destroying the edifices;" adding further, "No Hindoo dares lop off the heads of these young trees, and if they did, it would only put off the evil and inevitable day, for such are the vital powers of their roots, when they have once penetrated deeply into a building, that they will send out their branches again, cut them off as often as you may, and carry on their internal attack with undiminished vigour."

However, we have less to do with the tree itself than with the group of people who will be gathered presently under its leafy branches.



A khitmutgar, in spotless white garments, is just now engaged in laying out chota hazree, or little breakfast, under the cool shade of that monster peepul, and very refreshing and inviting the table looks, covered with its dazzling cloth, on which is spread the early morning repast, consisting of bunches of ripe yellow plantains, a dish of mangoes, toast, biscuits, tea, and other condiments.

This meal is a favourite institution in the East (as indispensable to Anglo-Indians as afternoon tea is to most English ladies), at which the station gossip is discussed, and characters taken away with as much gusto as at any other gathering of scandal-mongers. The British officer, faint and fagged by very early rising and a long parade, followed, perhaps, by orderly-room and other barrack duties, is grateful enough for that light refection, and unbuckles his sword with a sigh of intense relief as he lounges down at the table.

While Hussain Khan, the native butler, was putting the finishing touch to his work, a pretty child, some five or six years of age, appeared in the verandah of the bungalow, then skipping across the compound to the open gateway, looked down the road, and waited for the return of the regiments.

"How very late they are!" she exclaimed, coming to the table and casting a wistful glance at the fruits; "and I'm so hungry; I shall begin without mamma."

"*Bahoot burra parade hai, Gwinnie mem sahib,*" replied the native in his own language, rolling out his words in a pompous tone, as if his mouth were full of pudding; "a very big parade, Miss Gwinnie, but it will be soon over now. Shall I make little mem sahib a cup of tea?"

"Yes, I want something, please, Hussain; I can't wait any longer," and the next minute Miss Gwendoline

Vickers was perched on a chair, fortifying herself with a mango.

This young lady was an only child, and rather spoilt as a natural consequence, so she was somewhat imperious in her small way towards the native servants ; and even had the khitmutgar objected to her disturbing the symmetry of the table, such protest would probably have had no effect.

Mrs. Vickers, her mother, had been recently left a widow, Gwennie's father, a captain in the Rifle Brigade, then stationed at Bareilly, having died within the last few months.

In the ordinary course of events the widow would have sold up her furniture, vacated the bungalow, and left the station *en route* for England within a reasonable time of her husband's decease ; but certain circumstances militated against this customary programme being carried out.

Captain Vickers, as said, had been dead some months, having succumbed to a lingering fever, and still his widow retained her residence in the military lines ; but only on sufferance, for the usual period granted by courtesy in such cases had long since expired, and yet Mrs. Vickers made no sign of moving. Month after month passed, and the colonel commanding the regiment had intimated, first of all delicately, then rather pressingly, and finally peremptorily, that the quarters were required for another married officer. However, everything must have an end, and both the colonel's patience and the lady's excuses being exhausted at last, she found herself obliged to go to avoid unpleasant proceedings.

The reasons for clinging thus to her domicile, like a cat to its fireside, or a partridge to its home fields, were manifold. She was much attached to the regiment and all its belongings, and felt besides a natural reluctance

to give up her bijou residence<sup>1</sup>, which, with her own hands, she had made so pretty and homelike; added to this, the widow had found a confidential friend and adviser in one Major Bonus, an old Quihai commanding the native infantry regiment then at Bareilly, whose friendship and advice were conducive to her "hanging on" as long as possible.

Major Bonus, a widower himself, was desperately in love with Mrs. Vickers, and had lost no time in paying his addresses after the death of her husband; indeed, if the truth must be told, he had been smitten long before that event, and with the instinct of an old vulture, had, perhaps, somewhat anticipated matters. I merely say *perhaps*—a statement of that kind must be made reservedly; but however sad the possibility of such a thing, it is not, I fear, entirely without precedent in the East, or even nearer home.

Worse is it than the story of the private's wife at Frizzlempore, who followed her husband to the cemetery in abject grief, but during the funeral party's return to barracks, was reluctantly compelled to refuse Private Smith's kind offer of marriage because Private Jones had unfortunately come forward first and proposed beside the grave. Verily, *un embarras de richesse*!

Georgie Vickers, as she was familiarly called amongst the young officers, was a most egregious little flirt, although I will not calumniate her further by saying that she encouraged such advances as the major's *before* her bereavement. His attentions and kindnesses were gratefully received, but that was all; and as for the major himself, though no doubt the *attentions* were *intentions*, and as such the stepping-stones to a second edition of the altar, the ulterior motive, even if obvious enough, was never openly expressed. About this time Major Bonus had proposed

and been duly accepted, but in common decency they could not be married offhand so soon after her late husband's decease; nor was Mrs. Vickers in such a desperate hurry as the major, for I am bound to confess she did not care much for him, and rather preferred her freedom as a widow. Her engagement, then, was purely one of convenience, since the old Quihai's influence helped to keep her home over her head for a little while longer, which seemed to be her chief anxiety; besides this, his assistance from a pecuniary point of view was very acceptable, as she had been left very badly off. Therefore, so long as Georgie Vickers could make use of him, she was satisfied.

Gwennie was well into her second mango—and a pretty mess she had made of her face, hands, and frock, with the juicy fruit—when the syce, or native groom, entered the compound at the “double,” pulling up in front of the bungalow and squatting on his “hunkahs.” Here he awaited his mistress' return, Mrs. Vickers having been out riding on her “tatto” to witness the parade. “*Hah, mem sahib ahta hai,*” was the syce's reply to Gwennie's question as to whether her mother was coming. The native never moved from his position as he spoke, but sat whisking the ground in front of him with a chowri, his badge of office—a yak's tail attached to a piece of cane, and used for switching the tormenting flies off horses.

Soon afterwards a clatter of small hoofs, a cloud of dust at the gateway, and Georgie Vickers dashed into the compound on her active little pony, pulling up sharply at the steps of the verandah with the sudden precision of an adjutant, or field-officer, taking up a distant point.

A small pale-faced woman, five feet nothing, with a *retroussé* nose, large light grey eyes, nut-brown hair



(rather untidily kept), and a neat figure—such was the lady who now sprang nimbly from the back of “Gooral,” as she called her pony, and approached the chota hazree table. Strictly speaking, far from a pretty woman, if you took her to pieces, but withal something very attractive about her, especially in the eyes of the British subalterns apparently—and older birds too, to wit the major—with whose hearts she played battledore and shuttle-cock to an alarming extent.

But there was no harm in Mrs. Vickers—she knew where to stop; though, of course, by such foolish and systematic flirting, she gave too much reason for having her name dragged through the mire; and once an Anglo-Indian lady gives the slightest indication of being flighty, she is done for—her good name is gone—at least, in that little world in which she lives for the time—for there is no clapping the muzzle on the babbling mouth of scandal; especially in an out-of-the-way station in India where people have nothing else to talk about.

A thoroughly vain, frivolous woman, who seeks amusement at the cost of self-respect, risks losing even that respect from those who only seek amusement for themselves, caring naught for her good name; and maybe, after running the gauntlet of her neighbours’ scorn and scandal, she actually tempts the very devil by whom she is so naturally shocked, and then shrinks in virtuous horror from the insidious danger. Such a woman would do well to take counsel from the lines,—

“Let this great maxim be my virtue’s guide:  
In part, she is to blame that has been tried;  
He comes too near who comes to be denied.”

With all her flightiness, then, it was scarcely likely that Mrs. Vickers should go scatheless, notwithstanding



that her married life had been guileless enough; but all the men liked the little woman, therefore most of the women hated her, and pretended to look upon her as a very black sheep indeed, though envy and jealousy caused by the attentions she received were at the bottom of so much virtuous indignation.

When Mrs. Vickers saw Gwendoline seated at the table, and by this time smothered with mango-juice, with which she had also decorated the white table-cloth, she was naturally vexed, and cried out in a scolding voice,—

“You naughty child! go in directly, and tell Ninneah to put you on a clean frock. How dare you make yourself in such a mess, and the table too!”

Gwennie at once did as she was told, slinking off very sheepishly with her forefinger in her mouth, while her mother called to the khitmutgar to replace the stained tablecloth by a clean one as quickly as possible.

Now when a man is engaged to be married to a widow with children, the latter are generally looked upon as excrescences to be tolerated rather than liked; but when those children are allowed to go about dirty and slovenly, they become positively repulsive to their future step-father; Mrs. Vickers well knew this, and was therefore always careful to present her little daughter to the major as if she had just come home from the dhobi.<sup>3</sup> She need have been under no apprehension, however, for Major Bonus was excessively fond of Gwennie, who had been useful to him in a hundred ways as a sort of go-between during his season of wooing.

Hussain Khan had barely time to re-set the table when the troops filed past the compound on their return to quarters, with bands braying, colours fluttering, dust

<sup>3</sup> Native launderer.

flying, and all that goes to make up a military pageant, on however small a scale.

Presently, into the compound trotted Major Bonus, on his flea-bitten Arab charger, with jingling bridle-chain, and clanking scabbard, very military and very important; sitting his horse, moreover, in a jaunty, debonair style.

He dismounted, gave the Arab to his syce, and clanked somewhat stiffly up to the table, when Mrs. Vickers pushed forward the easiest chair, into which the exhausted warrior dropped with a grunt of satisfaction.

More jingling, more clanking, and the major was followed by four or five other officers (young ones), some on horse, some on foot, and all on the same errand, viz., chota hazree. They got leave to fall out as their regiments passed, and accordingly turned into the compound of the hospitable little bungalow, "the Vickers' Arms," as it was facetiously called, and which, on such occasions, was looked upon as a legitimate restaurant for the thirsty officer.

Major Bonus, however, did not half like this, for he was very jealous in his new position of the future husband—very proud of it too, and thought he ought to have the monopoly of the fascinating widow; though he might as well have asked the Commander-in-chief to do without his staff as Georgie Vickers to do without her morning levee.

"You look tired, Major," she observed—she never called him by his Christian name, though he wished she would. "You'd better have a peg, I think."

To the uninitiated, I may explain that a "peg" meant a brandy and soda, rather too common a beverage at chota hazree, or indeed at any time, to be good for the health of the Anglo-Indian.

"Thanks, I think I will, Georgie," replied Major

Bonus ; " I want something to pull me together, for I have a court-martial at eleven."

" Who's it on, Major ?," asked Tiny Gore, an ensign in the Rifle Brigade, and nicknamed Tiny from the fact of his being the lightest weight in the regiment.

" Sergeant Baines, of the Artillery. You might have seen that if you had read your orders, sir," returned the old Quihai, reprovingly.

" I never do read 'em, Major," grinned the unabashed subaltern. " My bearer<sup>4</sup> always does that ; he's a highly educated baboo. But I remember, now you mention the name, it's for insubordination or something, isn't it ?"

The major did not condescend a reply, and addressed himself to Mrs. Vickers. He was a techy old fire-eater, and had a strong aversion to all " griffs<sup>5</sup>"—in which category Gore might be classed—especially all griffins who presumed to flutter round the volatile widow.

" That's a useful bearer of yours, Tiny," remarked one of the others. " Writes all your letters too, doesn't he ?"

" Rather !" laughed the youngster ; " I've only to holloa out ' Ram Lal ! '—that's his name—' Mail day, write a letter to my mother,' or my father, as the case may be, and he does it."

" And do you ever read them before they go ?"

" Sometimes—not always—glad I did once, though. The beggar had got nothing to say, I suppose, so he'd translated the whole of one of the Bagh-à-bahar fables by way of filling up the sheet. I cut him half a month's pay for his cheek."

" Ha, ha, ha !" laughed the other ; " serve him right."

<sup>4</sup> A native valet.

<sup>5</sup> An abbreviation of griffins—a griffin being a young fellow fresh from England, or a greenhorn.

"You're on this court-martial, Perditon, are you not?" inquired the major, addressing a lieutenant of the Artillery, seated opposite.

"*He* might have seen that if he'd read *his* orders!" muttered the incorrigible Gore, in suppressed retaliation.

Perditon said he was.

"You know this Sergeant Baines, of course," continued the major. "What sort of a man is he?"

"Very superior in a way—well educated and all that sort of thing—"

"The reason I ask is because I've often heard your C.O.<sup>6</sup> mention him; quite a character, I suppose."

"Quite; but he's always coming to grief, and has been reduced to the ranks three or four times already, if not more."

"Why, he's like our regimental giant, Joe Corcoran, then," cried Gore; "*he's* always getting promoted and always getting smashed—never can keep the stripe for more than a week. Hulloo! talk of the devil—here comes the very identical."

And just then an enormous figure stalked into the compound with martial tread, dressed in the invisible green of the Rifle Brigade.

Corporal Corcoran—to give him his very temporary rank, for he now wore the fitful chevron on his arm—was a splendid-looking fellow, six feet four in his stockings, with a pair of shoulders to match his height. He might have been drum-major a dozen times over—and would have made a fine figure-head for any regiment, but for one unfortunate weakness—a strong leaning towards the canteen. Except for that little failing there

<sup>6</sup> Commanding officer.



could not be a nicer or better behaved soldier in the whole army than Joe Corcoran.

The eccentric point about him was that he seldom indulged too much until he *was* promoted, and then he at once and invariably wiped off his stripes with canteen "swipes," as some poetic comrade put it. However, on this occasion, he had upset all prophecy and precedent by retaining his lance rank for two whole moons.

Very sober indeed was he as he marched stolidly past the chota hazree group, saluting as he did so with the stiff formality peculiar to the British private.

That mechanical precision, which is a marked characteristic in so many old soldiers, has something irresistibly comic about it to those unaccustomed to the machine-like ways of the barrack veteran. Whatever they do and under whatever influence or emotion they may be actuated, their movements remind one somewhat of a life-size *marionette* worked slowly and deliberately and with studied precision; such peculiarities arising from perpetual drill, powerful discipline, and a long course of "extension motions."

Joe Corcoran was just one of these automatic figures, no doubt familiar enough to the military reader.

"Good morning, Corporal Corcoran, what is it?" inquired Mrs. Vickers.

"Just goin' to lend a hand with the packin', mum, that's all," replied Joe, making a half-turn to the right, and halting at attention.

"It's very good of you, I'm sure. I shall be thankful for your help."

Whereupon the dark green tower, saluting again, stalked on without further remark, and entered the bungalow.

As Mrs. Corcoran explained to Heffernan—her son



Joe had been the late Captain Vickers' bātman for a long time; that is to say, he used to make himself useful to the family in various ways, regular soldier-servants being the exception rather than the rule in India. Hence, only too glad to get back into his old harness if but for a day, he now sadly offered his last services at the break-up of the establishment; for that break-up grieved him sorely. He was very fond of the widow, whom he would have gone to the end of the world to serve; and his devotion to Gwennie was quite paternal—more especially now that she had lost her own father—and the little girl reciprocated his affection with all the ardour of her childish nature.

"*Koi hai ! àg lao !*"<sup>7</sup> now cried the major, pulling out his cheroot-case for a smoke, and making himself at home.

In reply to this summons the khitmutgar brought a lump of glowing charcoal on a broken piece of chatti,<sup>8</sup> and from this primitive arrangement each officer lighted his Manilla cheroot in turn.

"So you're really going to leave us to-morrow?" observed Tiny Gore to Mrs. Vickers, with a comical sadness in his face, and speaking in a low tone as he looked across at the major, who was just then intent on the charcoal.

"The day after—" said Georgie. .

"I'll take my dick I shall cry—I shan't get over it for years," exclaimed the ensign, gushingly, though still *sotto voce*.

"Don't be an idiot, Tiny," rejoined Mrs. Vickers. "What do *you* care about our going?" she added, not displeased with the subject, and raising her voice, as rather liking to parade her popularity before the major.

<sup>7</sup> "Somebody there! bring fire"—meaning a light.

<sup>8</sup> An earthenware vessel.

"Don't I just?" cried the youth, with impulsive honesty. "Doesn't everybody? I'm sure I don't know what we shall all do without you."

"Really?" returned the gratified lady; "well, it's nice to feel one will be missed by old comrades; however, I may not be absent so very long," she added, significantly, "I'm only going down country to Cawnpore, to stay with some friends for a little while, and when I return, if ever I do—"

"I hope it will not be as Mrs. Vickers," interposed the major, "but as Mrs. Bonus."

After which pithy remark the old field officer puffed away at his cheroot with excited importance.

"Bravo, Major! well said!" exclaimed the officers, in chorus.

"Here! let's drink a peg all round to the health of the future bride and bridegroom," cried the excitable Gore, who forthwith, with the help of the khitmutgar, poured out brandies and sodas in the most liberal style, as though he had been host instead of guest.

Glad of this excuse for a general "liquor up," the thirsty officers drank the toast with immense relish, afterwards rebuckling on their swords preparatory to a move, for it was getting late in the morning.

"Hulloa! what's the commotion now? I say, I say, holy pokers! just look!" ejaculated Gore, as they rose to leave; "why, the giant's gone stick, stark, staring mad!"

And well might he say so, for behold! there was the stately corporal prancing up and down the verandah like a playful young elephant, with Miss Gwennie perched on his broad shoulders, and "finishing" an imaginary race in the most approved style, with all the skill of George Fordham.

A loud guffaw from the officers brought the giant to his senses and "attention," and made him pull himself up to his enormous height so suddenly as nearly to smash the infant amateur's little skull against the low rafters.

"Gwennie, you young romp, come here directly," cried her mother, "and let the corporal get on with the packing."

Accordingly, the Lilliputian jockey dismounted from her Brobdingnagian steed and bounded towards the group with a hop, skip, and a jump, looking very picturesque, with her pretty laughing face and loose wavy hair—a rich brown, like her mother's, but having a golden tinge as if reflecting a gleam of sunshine. Her clean white frock, with a black sash, was rather tumbled from her equestrian exercise, and Mrs. Vickers smoothed her out with a gentle reproof when the child presented herself before the officers, with whom she was a general favourite, and looked upon by all as "the daughter of the regiment." The major patted Gwennie's head with proprietary pride, as the little girl stood beside him, and the next moment Tiny Gore swung her up into the air and gave her a hearty kiss, vowing that "she was a little stunner, and should be his wife some day as sure as eggs were eggs, when his ship came home."

Soon afterwards the chota hazree party broke up, and the officers having all taken their departure, Georgie Vickers repaired to the bungalow, to see about that dreadful business of packing.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## REDUCED TO THE RANKS.

"Then, a soldier ;  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel."

*Shakspeare.*

"Black was his beard, and manly was his face ;  
The balls of his broad eyes roll'd in his head—

\* \* \* \* \*

Big-boned, and large of limbs, with sinews strong,  
Broad shoulder'd, and his arms were round and long ;  
Upright he stood."

*Dryden.*

EXTRACT from Station Orders by Colonel the Honourable  
Hugh Melmont, C.B., commanding.

Bareilly, October 7th, 186—.

A district court-martial will assemble at the Mess-house  
of the Royal Artillery, on Thursday, the 9th instant, at  
11 a.m., for the trial of No. 2027, Sergeant John Baines,  
X Battery, Y Brigade, R.A.

*President :*

Major R. Bonus, 51st P.N.I.

*Members :*

Captain H. Wing, R.A.	Captain F. R. Stanners, 5th
Captain W. J. Ripley, 51st	Bat. Rifle Brigade.
P.N.I.	Lieut. J. Perditon, R.A.
Lieut. G. E. Haylock, 18th	Lieut. C. Raikes, 5th Bat.
Bengal Lancers.	Rifle Brigade.

Accordingly, at the appointed place and hour, the above court-martial duly assembled.

Preparatory to the proceedings, Major Bonus, the president, took his seat at the head of the highly-polished teak-wood table before the other members arrived. With fussy importance he examined certain papers relative to the prisoner, provided by Lieutenant Singleton, Royal Artillery, who acted as prosecutor.

The mess-table was denuded of everything except just the requisite materials for the occasion, which were collected in front of the president; a silver mortar (in miniature) doing duty as an inkstand; a blotting-pad, quill pens, foolscap paper, official documents tied up with red tape, "The Articles of War," and a Bible, were all that relieved the eye on that wilderness of polished teak.

Punkahs had not yet been taken down in the Artillery Mess-room, and the one overhead flapped and creaked with a dreary monotonous sound, as the black automaton in the verandah outside pulled it to and fro.

The punkah-wallah in India is quite a phenomenal creature, a sleepy piece of mechanism—requiring considerable oiling in the shape of chastisement now and then—rather than a responsible human being; but it is wonderful how the poor wretch will pull away at that bit of rope and cane for hours through the fiercest heat. He will often keep it going in this way while fast asleep, the somnambulistic motion becoming feebler and feebler sometimes, until roused to spasmodic efforts by the angry cry of "*Kainsho punkah!*"<sup>1</sup> from within.

Presently the members forming the court began to arrive one by one—" *julde puckarao!*"<sup>2</sup> "*lajao ghora!*"<sup>3</sup> and such like instructions being heard as the swords

<sup>1</sup> Pull the punkah!

<sup>2</sup> Quick! catch hold!

<sup>3</sup> Take the horse away.



clattered across the verandah and into the mess-room, when the officers, in various uniforms, took their places at the table. After the long hot weather, it was quite refreshing to see these differently coloured uniforms substituted for the monotonous, but necessary white dress, generally worn throughout the summer.

All being ready, Lieutenant Singleton now conveyed the order from the president to have the prisoner brought in. The sergeant in charge then ushered him into the room, mumbling the words, "Quick-march-right-turn-halt-front," in a low tone, as if under protest, and thinking it an unnecessary piece of formality; perhaps it was, but it's a way they have in the army.

Sergeant John Baines now stood arraigned on the following charges, read out by the president to the court:—

"First charge.—For having at Bareilly, on the 28th day of September, 186—, been absent from the inspection parade ordered by the officer commanding his battery.

"Second charge.—For insubordinate conduct, unbecoming a non-commissioned officer, and to the prejudice of good order and military discipline, in having at the same place and on the same day aforementioned, when reprimanded in the orderly-room by his commanding officer, made use of the following language: 'Am I a wretched schoolboy, to be publicly scolded in this way by an infernal old fool like you? Try me—smash me—do what you like—but for God's sake hold your tongue.' Or words to that effect."

The prisoner was a fine, soldierlike-looking man, with a profusion of dark brown beard, whisker, and moustache, which added dignity to an already handsome face (regulations as to shaving in India are less observed by both officers and soldiers than in England); these appendages

as well as the hair on his head being streaked with grey in many places, thereby making him appear older than he was, as if he had seen some ups and downs in life. His black, restless eyes and determined-looking nostrils indicated a lurking devil within him, which it were easy but dangerous to rouse, and his full chest and brawny shoulders gave evidence of great muscular strength. Yet, with all this, there was no coarseness in the man's *physique*; on the contrary, his figure, though powerful, was gracefully set, and there was a look of refinement both in his face and the shape of his hands.

The officers of the court, prompted by curiosity, stared with rather questionable taste at the prisoner as he stood before them, for he had earned a reputation for himself in the artillery, and was looked upon as somewhat an uncommon character.

A well-educated man, with a good address, Sergeant Baines' origin was a mystery to every one; nor was it likely to become known, since he kept his lips rigidly sealed on the subject. His superior qualifications had several times raised him from the ranks, but his frightfully hot temper had always proved the stumbling-block in his career. Yet he was as steady and sober a man as ever took the pledge, and would no doubt have made an excellent non-commissioned officer, but for the irritating "red-tape" system, which is such a prevalent curse in the British service. Strict discipline, by all means—for strict discipline is the very backbone of our army—but that miserable red-tape system, carried to the extent it is now-a-days, is quite another matter, and contributes far more to making officers narrow-minded and old womanish than any real good it does to the interior economy of a regiment.

Sergeant Baines was not endowed with sufficient patience

to observe the thousand and one *minutiae* which is now included in that interior economy, and which, as a non-commissioned officer, it was his duty to observe; consequently he was perpetually being "called over the coals." Now, beyond the hearing of the court assembled to try the prisoner, and "without partiality, favour, or affection," I may say that Sergeant John Baines had not blurted out his mutinous remarks without considerable provocation.

Major Fusserley, commanding X Battery, Y Brigade, was a dreadful officer to serve under, being an aggravating old woman by nature, rendered ten times worse by his profession—as *he* followed it. A perfect slave to petty details, red tape, in Major Fusserley's case, might be appropriately called the apron-strings of the Government, to which he was tied, literally and figuratively bowing down and worshipping his bonds:

"The Queen's Regulations" was Major Fusserley's bible, "The Articles of War" was his prayer-book, "The Army List" his dictionary, and "The Order Book" his daily paper—beyond which it is doubtful if this old martinet ever dipped into any literature of a lighter or more interesting nature.

This was by no means the first time that "old Mother Fussey," as he was nicknamed, had goaded Sergeant Baines beyond endurance, when the contumacious spirit at length broke forth with the result given.

It was rumoured that this gallant commanding officer, who was himself a particularly plebeian-looking man, was jealous of Sergeant Baines' distinguished and gentleman-like appearance; and it was further whispered that he was excessively jealous about his own wife, a pretty woman (fifteen years younger than her husband), whom he fancied had a weakness for this handsome sergeant, and who certainly expressed herself sometimes in terms of strong

admiration regarding him ; but of course such reports were all nonsense, mere barrack scandal, and not worthy of consideration !

With reference to the crimes for which the prisoner was brought up for trial, his absence from the parade in question was comparatively a trifling offence, and scarcely ought to have been entered in the charge, since some reason had been given for that absence ; but it was a fine opening for the nagging old woman to have a good worry-worry-worry at him, which had been eagerly jumped at.

The charges having been read over, to which the prisoner pleaded guilty, the court was cleared, and the officers sworn in, when the culprit was again brought forward, and the first witness called to prove the first charge in the indictment.

This evidence having been taken, the next witness was summoned to prove the charge of insubordination.

Number 4291, Farrier-Sergeant Charles Vulcan, X Battery, Y Brigade, Royal Artillery, a heavy-looking, bloated-faced warrior, with a nose like a strawberry, duly sworn, as follows :—

*Senior Member* (handing him the Bible, and speaking in a low tone).—"The evidence you shall give before this court—"

*President* (interrupting).—"The right hand, if you please, Farrier-Sergeant, and take off your glove."

This witness appeared to be all abroad, and very nervous and shaky, as if he had been drinking hard overnight.

*Senior Member* (continuing).—"The evidence you shall give before this court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God !"

*2nd Witness* (kissing the Bible).—"So help me bob !"  
(A suppressed titter from the court.)



*Pres.* (very gravely).—"So help you God, Farrier-Sergeant."

*2nd Wit.* (hurriedly).—"So help me God, sir. Beg pardon, sir." \*

*Pres.*—"Escort and prisoner, stand-at-ease."

*2nd Wit.* (states).—"On the morning of the 28th I was present at ord—"

*Pres.* (pulling him up).—"When, Farrier-Sergeant?"

*2nd Wit.*—"About half-past seven, sir."

*Pres.*—"What day?"

*2nd Wit.*—"On the morning of the 28th, sir."

*Pres.*—"We want the month, Farrier-Sergeant."

*2nd Wit.*—"September, sir."

*Pres.*—"Well—on the morning of the 28th of September—?"

*2nd Wit.*—"On the morning of the 28th of September, sir, about half-past seven o'clock, I was present at orderly-room—"

*Pres.* (pulling him up again).—"Where, Farrier-Sergeant?"

*2nd Wit.*—"At our orderly-room, sir."

*Pres.*—"But what place? You must state what place."

*2nd Wit.*—"In the Artillery Barracks, sir."

*Pres.* (losing patience).—"Tut, tut! I mean what station, Farrier-Sergeant?"

*2nd Wit.*—"Oh—why, Bareilly, sir."

*Pres.*—"Exactly so. Well? go on."

*2nd Wit.*—"On the morning of the 28th—"

*Pres.*—"Yes; we've got all that down."

*2nd Wit.* (getting confused).—"I was present about Bareilly at half-past orderly—I mean about seven o'clock, at—"

*Pres.*—"Come, come, Farrier-Sergeant, let's have it

\* A true incident.



clearly. On the morning of the 28th of September, at Bareilly, at about half-past seven o'clock, you were present—Yes? go on."

2nd Wit.—"At orderly-room, sir, when—"

Pres.—"But *what* orderly-room?"

2nd Wit. (rather suspecting he is being made a fool of).—"Why, *our* orderly-room, of course—"

Pres. (reprovingly).—"There's no 'of course' in the matter, Farrier-Sergeant; say at orderly-room in the Royal Artillery Barracks, then."

2nd Wit. (repeating like a parrot).—"At orderly-room, in the Royal Artillery Barracks then, when Sergeant Baines was brought up—"

Pres.—"Who, Farrier-Sergeant?"

2nd Wit. (very emphatically, and determined to be right at last).—"Sergeant John Baines, X Battery, Y Brigade, Royal Artillery, Bareilly, sir."

Pres. (with calm patience).—"Do you mean the prisoner before the court, Farrier-Sergeant?"

2nd Wit.—"Yes, sir" (wondering who else he could mean).

Pres.—"Then, say so, please."

2nd Wit.—"When the prisoner, Sergeant John Baines, was brought up before the major for absence—"

Pres. (darting at him).—"What! *Whom* do you mean by the major? What major?"

2nd Wit. (decisively).—"Why, Major Thomas William Fusserley, sir, X Battery, Y—"

Pres.—"The commanding-officer, in fact?"

2nd Wit.—"Yes, sir."

Pres.—"Then say so, please."

2nd Wit.—"When the prisoner was brought before the commanding-officer for absence from parade, and afterwards—"

*Pres.*—"But what parade, Farrier-Sergeant? You haven't told us what parade—"

*2nd Wit.*—"Inspection parade, sir."

*Pres.*—"Then you must say so, please."

*2nd Wit.* (in desperation, and resolved not to be bothered any more).—"For absence from inspection parade at Bareilly, sir, on the artillery parade ground, at half-past six Hay M—"

*Pres.* (approvingly).—"There, that's the way to give your evidence. Well? go on."

*2nd Wit.*—"And afterwards, when the major was reprimanding him—"

*Pres.*—"You mean the commanding-officer—"

*2nd Wit.*—"I mean the commanding-officer; yes, sir."

*Pres.*—"Then say so, please."

*2nd Wit.*—"When the commanding-officer was reprimanding him, he began to fidget about and get very angry—"

*Pres.*—"Who began to fidget about, Farrier-Sergeant?" (Here the prisoner smiles, while the members of the court bite their nails and clear their throats with suppressed irritation.)

*2nd Wit.*—"The prisoner, sir."

*Pres.*—"Then why the deuce don't you say so?"

And so on *ad libitum*. Consequently it took the best part of an hour to get through this witness's evidence, and Major Bonus, by absurd and unnecessary interruptions, made the Farrier-Sergeant's statement appear the most tautological declaration ever heard or read; while the latter, very much fuddled to start with, became hopelessly bewildered, and ended by getting a good deal out of temper.

Between the president and the witness it was not wonderful that the process of taking down evidence

was protracted and tedious; for Farrier-Sergeant Vulcan was just one of those wrecks of a smart soldier so often to be seen in India; another of the numberless victims to that thirsty climate—made thirstier still, no doubt, by the heat of the forge—with the curse of drink written in his face, and evidenced by his speech and palsied action. As he stood before that court he was undoubtedly bordering on a state of *delirium tremens*, and his collapse was a mere question of time. The man was what may be termed a *sober drunkard*, and these sober drunkards are not easy to deal with in a summary manner, since they give no opportunity exactly for being called to account, although their example in a regiment is most baneful and mischievous; but drunkenness being their normal condition, they get through their duty somehow; nor could they perform it so well, in all probability, if really sober. Major Fusserley, however, was watching this worthy disciple of Bacchus as a cat watches a mouse, and was longing to bring him to the same tribunal as the prisoner then under trial.

On the other hand, Major Robert Bonus—or “Bobby Bones,” as he was irreverently called—being in command of a native regiment, liked to make the most of his importance as president of a court-martial on a European non-commissioned officer; but the members of the court, the prosecutor, the witness, the escort, and the prisoner himself, were all driven to such a state of irritability at last as to feel a strong inclination to knock old Bobby Bones off his presidential chair, and sit on his head in a body.

But suffice it to say, without going into further details, that both charges were at length proven, Sergeant Baines found guilty, as he had pleaded, and sentenced to be reduced to the ranks. This sentence having been duly

confirmed by the officer commanding the station or district, a parade was called, at which the prisoner underwent the degrading ceremony of having the chevrons cut from his sleeves in the presence of all his comrades. Then the late Sergeant went back to his barrack as plain Gunner Baines—a morose and disgusted man—and Major Fusserley's dignity was avenged !

Poor Baines ! Only another victim to an old woman in uniform—only one more instance of a good soldier ruined by a bad officer ! and it may be truly said, that excessive zeal, carried to a pitch of fanaticism, and becoming at last a species of mental disease (especially when added to a nagging propensity), disqualifies a man for command even more than actual “slackness” and incapacity.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## A WOMAN WITH A STORY.

"O'er that fair broad brow were wrought  
The intersected lines of thought ;

\* \* \* \* \*

Scars of the lacerating mind  
Which the soul's war doth leave behind."

*Byron.*

"Thus sometimes hath the brightest day a cloud."—*Shakespeare.*

THE court-martial over, Major Bonus called for his horse and galloped back to his lines, taking Mrs. Vickers' bungalow *en route*. There he found her in the midst of her packing agonies, for it was still hot in the day-time, and not at all conducive to over-exertion. Georgie, however, gave the real work to the corporal, her ayah, and other servants to do, while she sat in an easy chair in cool and *dégagé* attire, and chatted to them—her *refrain* being a good grumble at having to turn out of her home.

The giant was quite an adept at packing, apparently ; and he ordered the natives about in grand style, at the same time doing more work in five minutes than they did in a whole day.

Mrs. Vickers was not going to take away very much with her, and had arranged with Major Bonus that he should look after the sale of her furniture and immove-



able effects, consigning to his custody sundry articles which she wished to reserve.

There was some uncertainty about their future plans at present, and it was doubtful whether she would return to Bareilly or not, since a rumour had reached the major that his regiment might be ordered to move at short notice.

"Well, Corporal," remarked Mrs. Vickers, during the packing—Joe liked to be called corporal while he was one, however transitory the rank—"Well, Corporal, I suppose you'll be sorry to lose us, won't you?"

"Don't name it, mum," replied Joe, in fearful contortions over the strap of a bullock-trunk, which he was trying to fasten. "Sorry! I should think I shall just."

"And I'm afraid we're not likely to meet again very soon, as the regiment's going home. I suppose you'll go with it, Corporal; you won't volunteer?"

"Faith! I don't know what I shall do yet, mum." Joe Corcoran, although the son of an Irishman, had never been in his father's country since his childhood, so he hardly had the true Hibernian brogue, although he sometimes affected to speak it as a sort of national privilege. "Ye see it's just this way, mum. I like this country well enough; but now the poor Captin's dead—savin' your prisence, mum—and you and the little 'un are goin' away from the ridgement, why, I've got no ties like. But there's another ridgement now as I want to get into, and that's the hundred and twenty-sixth, mum."

"And why the hundred and twenty-sixth, Corporal?"

"'Cos there's an old friend o' mine, mum, as is a captin in that ridgement."

"Indeed! what is his name?"

"Captin Heffenham, or something like that, I think."

"But surely you know—"

"I don't remember rightly till I hear it again, mum, 'cos he's only took that name lately, instead of his old one."

"And what was that, Corporal?"

"Denby—Mr. Albert Denby—"

"Good gracious! you don't mean to say that?—how strange!"

"Why, mum—do you know him?"

"I certainly knew one gentleman of that name, an officer in the service; I daresay it is the same—what is he like?"

Joe described him in a rough-and-ready sort of way.

"Oh, yes, that's the man I mean, Corporal—no doubt about it."

"He's a rale nice gentleman, mum; that is, as I remember him years ago, and I dessay he aint changed for the wuss. My mother writes and tells me about him now and then, and I'm goin' to get further 'tic'lars from her, 'cos, you see, mum, I want to get transferred to his ridgement directly."

"So Mr. Albert Denby is an old friend of yours, Corporal, and—?"

"And a friend of yours, too—yes, that's it, mum. And we never found it out till now."

"How very strange!" observed Mrs. Vickers, musingly.

"It is funny, mum. But o' course it's only these changes what made me mention the gentleman, and think of getting to serve under him."

"How long is it since you saw him?"

"Well, I can't say exactly, mum. Some ten or twelve years, maybe. But I recollect him as well as if it was yesterday."

"And by your description he was not much changed

when I saw him last. That was more recently; five or six years ago."

"Oh, indeed, mum? Then that must have been when you married the Captin, and came to India."

"Yes, it was about that time," she replied, abstractedly. As he spoke a cloud passed across her face as if some sudden and unpleasant recollection forced itself upon her, and for several minutes her mind seemed to wander far away, the white forehead contracting as though from mental or physical pain.

During the pause in their conversation the giant lifted a heavy box full of things, making no more of the weight than if it had been a brickbat, and took it outside into the back verandah, where the other luggage was deposited.

"Did you say the 126th were coming to India, Corporal?" inquired Mrs. Vickers, as he re-entered.

"I don't know, mum, by rights. I'm not sure how they stand on the roster; but I think I heard it said they was one of the next for foreign service."

"Indeed! Then if they do come out this cold season you'll volunteer and stop in the country, I suppose?"

"Yes, mum, I s'pose I shall. But I can't be certain about nothink not yet."

Mrs. Vickers then changed the conversation; for although the corporal harped on the subject of Albert Denby for a while, she appeared disinclined for further discussion of their mutual friend.

"Well, Major," said she, as that officer now entered the bungalow, "and what have you done with him?"

"What have I done with whom, Georgie?"

"The mutinous sergeant, of course."

"Oh, to be sure. Well, I'm sorry I can't gratify a lady's curiosity, but it's against the Articles of War to

disclose or divulge the sentence of the court until it shall be duly approved and confirmed."

"Never mind the Articles of War. I want to know particularly. Surely you can tell *me* privately."

"Indeed I'm afraid I can't."

"That's always the way with you men. I thought you said you could never refuse *me* anything."

Georgie Vickers here pouted her pretty mouth like a spoilt child, for, though rather full-lipped, it *was* a pretty mouth—the best feature of her face.

"Yes, my dear; but this is different," explained the major. "One mustn't fly in the face of the Articles of War, you know."

"Very well, I suppose you're right. I only hope you'll always be as loyal to your future wife as you are to your Queen."

"I hope I shall, Georgie. But tell me, why did you want to know? What makes you take an interest in this—this Sergeant Baines?"

"Oh, I'm not aware that I do particularly. It's only that I felt rather sorry for him. He seems such a superior sort of man."

"Indeed, how do you know that? When did you have an opportunity of judging?"

"Well, you remember the non-commissioned officers' ball we gave in our regiment some time ago? I danced with him twice that evening, and I was very much struck with his conversation and manner; not a bit like the other serjeants."

"Ah, it is a pity, then, that he doesn't regulate his conversation and manner towards his superior officers; then he wouldn't come to grief so often. However, if you are really interested to know, though you might easily guess, I can write and tell you his sentence when

it appears in orders. You'll receive a letter from me at Cawnpore by the time you arrive there. But now about the packing—how are you getting on with it? "

"Not very fast, I'm afraid," she replied, glancing helplessly at the chaos around her.

"You look tired and dispirited, my dear; quite melancholy, in fact. Come, I can't have you knocking yourself up."

"Oh, I shall be all right as soon as this is over, and we make a start," she returned, with a smile. Not that she had over-exerted herself at all. It was something else than fatigue that made her look just then so dispirited and melancholy, as the major had remarked. "I'm sure I don't know what I should do without my corporal," she added, "he's quite a professional packer."

Hereupon Joe, who was then courting a fit of apoplexy over a tremendous camel-trunk, sprang to attention, and, saluting the major, said,—

"Shall I take this, sir, and thim other things over to your bungalow this evening, sir, or to-morrow morning?" pointing as he spoke to a number of articles set aside to be placed in the major's keeping.

"Whenever you like, Corcoran. I've given all directions to my servants to have them stowed away carefully."

"And please, Major Bonus," exclaimed little Gwennie, coming forward with a wicker birdcage in her arms, "do take care of my poor 'chowkidar' for me"—the name she had given to the minah<sup>1</sup> perched inside the cage—"see that he's fed, and please do talk to him sometimes, or he'll feel so dull."

"Very well, little one," replied the major, kindly, and

<sup>1</sup> The Indian starling—"Chowkidar" being the Hindustani for a watchman.



stroking her glossy hair; "I'll attend to the chow-kidar. He shall have first post of honour in my sitting-room, and I'll take him into my confidence on every occasion."

Here Mrs. Vickars caught sight of the corporal looking at the bird in the cage with wistful eyes, and a dreadfully disappointed expression.

"Why, Gwennie," she exclaimed, hastening to the rescue, "you've forgotten; you said the corporal was to have the minah. Besides, you mustn't trouble Major Bonus with such things."

"On the contrary, I should be highly flattered. But if the chowkidar is promised—" began the major.

"Why, of course he is!" cried Gwennie; "I said Joe was to have him. How silly of me, dear old Joe, to forget like that! There, now mind you take care of him," she added, shaking her head with an important air, and placing the cage in the delighted giant's arms, as if it had been a baby about to be christened; and Joe took it with the reverential care of an officiating minister.

"Now—let me see—I'm to keep the pony and sell the trap; but what are you going to do with Pompey, Georgie?" inquired Major Bonus, indicating a hideous mongrel, very churlish in its nature, and with a hatred for all niggers, except just those on whom it was dependent for food.

"I mean to take him with me; it's safer travelling with a dog I think—especially a growler like Pompey; he'll make the natives civil."

"You're quite right; these fellows have a cordial dread of the white man's dog: I believe they fancy it's charmed in some way, or the devil in disguise sent to protect one of his angels. Though they could hardly think so in *your* case," he added, gallantly; "but tell me, is there anything

else I can do for you, Georgie?—any other way in which I can be useful. Pray command me.”

“Many thanks; no, I think not. I’m sure I am very much obliged to you as it is.”

“Don’t speak of it, pray. It’s not only a pleasure, my dear, but my duty.”

As he said this he leant over and kissed her forehead.

Although extremely kind and thoughtful—for Major Bonus was really fond of the little widow—his endearments were somewhat too patronizing and paternal in their nature to please Mrs. Vickers, and lacked that charm of the lover’s caress which she would have preferred. This, I am afraid, made her hold his affection a little cheaply, since she felt rather as if engaged to be married to her grandfather, or at any rate her father, for the latter the major was quite old enough to be.

“I must get back to the lines now, my dear,” observed Major Bonus, presently, “for I’ve several things to see to. By the bye, I’ve ordered your dâk and bearers,” he added, as he was going out of the bungalow; “they’ll be here at sundown to-morrow, so that’s all right. *Au revoir* till this evening; I shall meet you at the band, I suppose?”

“Yes, it’s *our* band to-night, so of course I shall go. Perhaps it will be the very last time I shall hear it.”

Mrs. Vickers sighed to herself sadly as she said this, and followed the major out into the verandah. There she watched him mount his charger and trot off, jingle jangle, jingle jangle, with the true military jog on which he prided himself, waving his hand jauntily to her as he disappeared at the gateway.

Punctually at five o’clock the same evening the syce brought round Gooral harnessed to the light pony-carriage for Mrs. Vickers and Gwennie to drive to the band for that very last time.

Gooral was a small wiry tatto, a useful pony, but certainly not quiet either to ride or drive, though Mrs. Vickers used him for both. He was what the natives called a *bahoot-bobberywallah*, or a *burra budmash*, which meant that he was an exceedingly frisky little brute, or an exceedingly vicious one. The former he decidedly was, a very small beast with a very big spirit, and doubtless there was a good deal of vice about him as well.

Every evening as regularly as clock-work when they went for a drive the bobbery Gooral plunged about furiously at starting, and every evening invariably knocked the syce either into the verandah or into the bushes. That long-suffering domestic, however, had become so thoroughly accustomed to this part of the programme, that if he had not found himself sprawling on his back as usual he would quite have missed it and would have thought something was wrong. Accordingly that evening he was utterly astonished to see the pony trot off quietly, and he himself still preserving the perpendicular. Whether the Gooral knew by instinct of the approaching departure of his mistress and thereby felt depressed, or whether he had not got over the tremendous bucketing she had given him in the morning, it is impossible to say—probably the latter—but he certainly went out of the compound, for a wonder, like an old sheep.

The syce shook his head as he looked after them and marvelled; indeed, so amazed was he that he could not move for a few seconds, remaining as if spell-bound, and thereby getting a very bad start after the carriage. Notwithstanding this he was at the band first, and had been there some minutes before his mistress drove up.

A wonderful fellow the syce, who, by cutting across country, combined with considerable staying powers, appears to be almost ubiquitous in his nature. His master,

maybe, leaves him in the compound as he gallops off to parade or elsewhere, and, lo and behold, when he arrives at his destination, there is the syce waiting for him, perfectly calm and not blowing as much as he or his horse. Of course there are syces and syces; but I think I may say that much of the average.

When Georgie Vickers pulled up near the band-stand, at her customary corner, there was as yet a very small audience assembled; and although the musicians were playing away vigorously, their sweetness was almost wasted on desert air, for beyond a few ayahs with washed-out looking infants in their arms, and pale sickly-looking children clinging to their skirts, the native infantry doctor and his wife in a buggy, a Parsee shopkeeper, and a couple of native chuprassees, there was no one to listen.

Gwennie jumped out of the pony carriage as soon as they arrived, and went to play with the other children, so Mrs. Vickers, for a short time, was left alone in her glory—a very unusual occurrence indeed, for on such occasions her carriage was generally besieged by gay young officers; but Georgie was glad of her solitary grandeur for this evening, since her heart was heavy and sad at leaving the old regiment—and from other causes as well. The soft strains of music—they were playing a beautiful selection from *La Favorita* at the time—soothed her sorrowing spirit, and she preferred to enjoy the delicious passages without a running accompaniment of Ensigns' clatrap.

But not long was this sweet Donizettian solitude to be uninterrupted, for gradually and surely the officer element crept upon the scene, and gradually and surely the widow and her tiny equipage were surrounded by a cluster of chaffing, chattering, and cheeky young subal-



terns, who hovered together at her shrine like so many starlings on a favourite tree.

This was Georgie's normal condition, it is true, and as a rule she was well equal to the occasion, keeping them all going at once with her pert and piquant observations; but to day there seemed a certain restraint in her manner—a listless, preoccupied air about her, which did not fail to attract attention, and as she made an effort to talk to, and laugh with, the gay spirits around her, a far-away look in her eyes betrayed that *her* spirit was not with them.

“The poor little woman is sorry to leave us,” whispered a young ensign of the Rifle Brigade to one of his companions. “She’s got the blues—don’t let’s chaff her to-night.”

So saying, with good-natured intention, he hooked his arm into his brother officer’s, and they sauntered off to another carriage.

Yes, she *was* sorry—very sorry to leave them, and once or twice the hot tears sprang to her eyes as some young friend touched her heart by simple words of kindness, words conveyed in a little good-bye speech, which mingled sadly with that plaintive air still floating in her ears. She keenly appreciated the tender sympathy thus expressed, for, with more enemies than friends amongst the ladies, she was dependent on these boys for gentle fellow-feeling and condolence.

Yes, she was sorry to leave the dear old regiment and all her comrades, especially that faithful giant, the corporal. But Georgie Vickers had even more than this to weigh upon her mind just then—more than this to crush the animal spirits which so characterized her nature. Her widowhood, the memory of her late husband, the break up of her home—these were recent and present



sorrows; but it was the long-ago with which her mind was then filled and which chiefly troubled her—the memory of something almost forgotten, but lately revived with two-fold bitterness.

No one would have thought, to look at Georgie Vickers in her naturally merry and vivacious moods, that she was a woman with some painful secret preying at her heart—a woman with a story, in fact; but so it was.

“The canker blooms have full as deep a dye  
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,  
Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly  
When summer’s breath their masked bud discloses.”

And the gnawing canker within had been brought to life again that very day. Little did honest Joe Corcoran know, when he mentioned the name of Albert Denby, what cruel recollections that name brought back to her mind—how it made the old wound bleed afresh—how it caused her old sorrow to wake and cry; and the torture was the more agonizing since she could make no confidant—impart the secret of her trouble to no one in the world—not even to Major Bonus, her future husband—less even to him than any other living soul.

Poor little woman! she was much to be pitied; and, far more sinned against than sinning, *her* story was indeed a sad one. But why did she fret and worry herself about it all? it might still remain buried in the past, never, never to be revealed till the crack of doom, when the great book would be opened against her. It might be so, it is true, but for one person—one man, who, as she believed, was the sole participator of that secret; and that man was Albert Denby. Oh, how she prayed that she might never meet him—that he might never find a trace of her again. While she thus pondered

sadly and anxiously, Georgie Vickers felt that she could have bitten her tongue out for vexation at the inadvertent disclosure she had made to the corporal. But when Joe mentioned that name she had almost forgotten for the moment how Albert Denby had been connected with the past secret of her life, and actually went on conversing about him before the painful memory rushed upon her. Light-hearted by nature, and somewhat superficial in character, Georgie never troubled herself to think too deeply on any subject; and it was only when the bitter memory of the past actually forced itself on the present, that she allowed it to prey upon her mind.

Through the corporal, then, this man, Albert Denby, would hear of her again as surely as she had mentioned his name, unless she bound the giant over to strictest secrecy, and that she was resolved to do before they parted.

The giddy throng of youngsters finding it rather slow at last beside the widow's pony carriage—for she made little effort to entertain them, and it was clear that there was something wrong—began to move off one by one, and so gave Major Bonus, on his flea-bitten charger, a chance of drawing near.

That poor Arab must have been endowed with wonderful powers of endurance, for he seemed to be always on duty—always champing away at that imposing military bit, in which he found, perhaps, some peculiar nutriment, for he seldom had time to champ anything else.

It was a favourite joke of Tiny Gore's, who asserted that Bobby Bones' charger never got anything to eat except the chaff so plentifully bestowed upon its master, and that the grey must have derived all its mettle from sucking at its bit.

Major Bonus was not more successful than the sub-

alterns in drawing Georgie into conversation, and seeing her so depressed, he thought she would be better left alone ; so, shortly before the band struck up " God save the Queen," he wished her good night like an affectionate father, and trotted off—strictly *à la militaire*—to dress for mess.

The band was playing the last bar of the national anthem, Gwennie had been summoned to take her seat in the carriage, and her mother was about to drive off, when Ensign Gore cantered back on his pony for a parting word.

" I say, there's no doubt, I suppose, about your going to-morrow ?" said he ; " what time ?"

" We shall start between seven and eight in the evening, I think," replied Mrs. Vickers.

" All right, I shall be there, and Warburton too ; we're going to see you off, you know."

" That's very good of you, Tiny ; but it'll just be at your mess time— ?"

" Oh, we don't care for that," exclaimed the youth, glad of an excuse for doing something out of the hum-drum routine ; " and we're going to help to carry you out of the station—"

" How *do* you mean ?"

" Why, as palkee-wallahs, to be sure ; you'll see."

" Nonsense, Tiny, I won't have you do anything so silly," observed Georgie, nevertheless pleased at this proposed mark of adulation.

" Oh, but we will ; what's the harm ?"

" Yes, do, please do, Mr. Gore," cried little Gwennie, clapping her hands in delight ; " it *will* be such fun."

" All right, little one," rejoined the ensign, smiling, " we mean to do so ; that's settled. Hulloo ! I say, I say, there goes our first bugle, and I've got a guest coming

to dine with me, so I must look sharp. *Au revoir* till to-morrow evening then," he added, giving his tatto a tremendous rib-roaster as a hint to start.

"Good-night, Mr. Palkeewallah!" laughed Gwennie, calling after him, as his pony, a dreadful slug—not at all like Gooral—went off at a slovenly shamle, and made his way across the maidan towards the ensign's bungalow.

In this journey from Bareilly to Cawnpore I should mention that Mrs. Vickers and her daughter were obliged to go by palkee, or palanquin dâk, as far as Futteyghur, for at that time there was no proper road between the latter place and Bareilly to admit of travelling by a wheeled conveyance. Such a mode of progression, however, is by no means so irksome or unpleasant as might be supposed; and to any one not pressed for time it is somewhat better than jolting and jogging over very bad roads, in rickety gharries with groggy horses, although it may be a little slower.

You dine before starting, we will say, then light your cheroot (premising you to be a man and a smoker), jump into the palkee and take up a comfortable reclining position, with all the materials for sundry pegs and other refreshment stowed away in the network in front of you, depending from the roof. Everything being ready for a start, the "mussalchee" lights his torch—which emits a most villainous smell of rank oil, impregnating the fresh night air around—the bearers cry "*Uthao!*" and then hoist you up with a groan, as if you were a second Daniel Lambert. A short pause follows, during which there is a little shifting of the palkee-pole on the men's shoulders, and then away you go to that mysterious, monotonous chant, "Ee-yur ee-yur ee-yur ee-yur," changing presently to "Yah-ee yah-ee yah-ee," and so on, which, by way of amusing your imagination, you may convert into any words and



phrases you please, until you 'fall asleep. Proceeding thus by rather long stages, you stop at certain "chow-kees" to change bearers, and a dâk bungalow or two for the everlasting *mourghi*<sup>1</sup> grill by way of refreshment; so, between eating and drinking, smoking and sleeping, you manage to kill the time, and arrive at the end of your journey much sooner than you expect, having made no more of it than a commercial traveller now-a-days of a run from London to Liverpool.

It may strike the reader as rather a dangerous proceeding for an unprotected woman and child to travel in this way through the wilds of India; but after the mutiny, when the country was perfectly quiet, it was as safe as walking down Regent Street in broad daylight; safer, perhaps, than doing so by night.

The next day the faithful corporal was at his post again, and by dint of his gigantic energy the toils of packing fast drew to a close. Georgie Vickers had been debating in her mind all the morning how to broach the subject she was so anxious about; how to bind over the trustworthy Joe to say nothing whatever concerning her to this Albert Denby, *alias* Heffernan.

After a good deal of beating about the bush, she managed at length to express herself to this effect; and although Joe was rather mystified and surprised, he promised to do exactly as she wished.

"I daresay he has almost forgotten me, Corporal," said she, the wish being father to the thought, "and will never mention my name if you don't; but pray mind what I ask you. Though I can't explain myself exactly, you may be sure I have good reason for the request."

"That's right enough, mum," replied Joe; "I gets my orders from you. You tell me you don't want this,

<sup>1</sup> A fowl.



or you don't want that, and you may trust Joe Corcoran to mind what you tell him."

"Thank you, my honest old friend; thank you for that promise, and all your faithful kindness," returned the widow, taking his hand and grasping it warmly, much to the great corporal's astonishment, who drew himself up to "attention" immediately afterwards, arms by the sides, and gave a stealthy glance at the lucky hand as he moved it out from the wrist at right angles to the trouser-seam, as if curious to know how it looked after the honour.

"I shall miss you, Joe; I shall miss you terribly when we're gone, and so will dear little Gwennie; but you must write and let us hear of you now and then; that is, until—until you leave the regiment."

She added this; remembering, perhaps, that any correspondence afterwards might be unadvisable.

"All right, mum, I understand. I've got my orders, don't you be afraid. Lor, mum"—here he heaved a sigh like the bellows of an organ—"this day don't seem right to me at all. I got off my cot this mornin' with the wrong leg fust—I buttoned up my tunic with the buttons all askew—I clapped on my forage-cap hind part afore—and I was late for parade and got pulled up in front o' the or-ficer. I'm off my head to-day, that's what I am, and no wonder, when I come to think of it;" whereupon he gave a jerk with his rigid body, as if he had suddenly received the first word of command, and was waiting for the second. "No wonder, when I'm a goin' to lose you, mum, and that blessed little 'un, all in a lump."

Here poor Joe entirely forgot about being a corporal, and dismissed himself from parade with a sniff and a hasty snatch at his watering eyes; either from shame at such weakness, or force of habit in "quitting the right

hand sharply after the last motion." Joe Corcoran's feelings were too much for him as it was; but when the little woman, seeing the great giant shed a tear, gave way, too, and sobbed and cried at the approaching parting, he could not stand it any longer, but rushed out into the verandah with an audible gulp, and anything but the regulation step.

There he found that "blessed little 'un" playing with Ninneah, the ayah, and catching her up in his arms, he smothered her with kisses, calling her his "little darlint," his "sweet little mavourneen," his beautiful "little cruskeen lawn," and other names which he improvised for the occasion, and which were all Dutch to Gwennie.

"Dear old Joe," exclaimed the little girl, putting her arms round his brawny neck, and kissing the affectionate giant in return, "don't you fret and cry about us; we shall soon come back, and we won't forget one another, will we? Look here, Joe," a bright thought occurring to her, "when-ever you feel dull, you just have a talk with the chowkidar. Get him to speak to you about mamma and me, and that'll cheer you up, won't it? Besides, he'll like you to talk to him sometimes, poor old bird!"

Joe said he would, *that* he would; indeed had she given him instructions to shave all the hair off his head once a month during her absence, he would have promised to do it at all risks.

It was fortunate that the packing had been finished in good time, for as the hour drew near for their departure, Joe became more and more incapacitated for any rational work, and could only wander restlessly about and in and out of the verandah, declaring that that was the worst day for him since ever he 'listed.

At last the palkee and bearers arrived, together with the "bangywallahs" for the luggage, and almost at the

same time, true to their threat, Ensigns Gore and Warburton appeared also, and stood ready to take up their positions as amateur palkee-wallahs.

Major Bonus did not quite approve of this madcap arrangement; but as the widow did not object, and the youngsters pleaded to be allowed the privilege, he hardly liked to interfere; more especially as he intended to escort them himself on that poor overworked charger for a certain distance, and so give a respectable tone to the little *cortége*.

But Joe Corcoran was not to be outdone—not he; and if there was no objection to his lending a hand, let the two officers support the pole behind, while he took it in front by “hissself,” and so carry their burden in triumph beyond the station boundary. This was accordingly agreed upon, intensely to the amusement and satisfaction of the palanquin-bearers, who were glad to be rid of their load even for a little way.

“*Wah, wah ! bahoot accha sahib logue ! yih bahoot accha tumàsha hai,*”<sup>\*</sup> they muttered in chorus as they trotted alongside the palkee, Gore and Warburton imitating the grunt of the natives to perfection, while they performed their self-imposed task, much to the merriment of Mrs. Vickers and Gwennie; the corporal stalking on before in stolid silence.

From the enormous stature of the giant in front, as compared with that of the officers behind, the widow naturally found her feet a good deal higher than her head when they started, as if they had been ascending a very steep hill. But what matter though the ship did not ride on an even keel? Georgie Vickers felt that this was a labour of love, and appreciated it accordingly.

Right well they bore their burden far out of the station

<sup>\*</sup> “Bravo, bravo! very good gentlemen these! This is capital fun!”

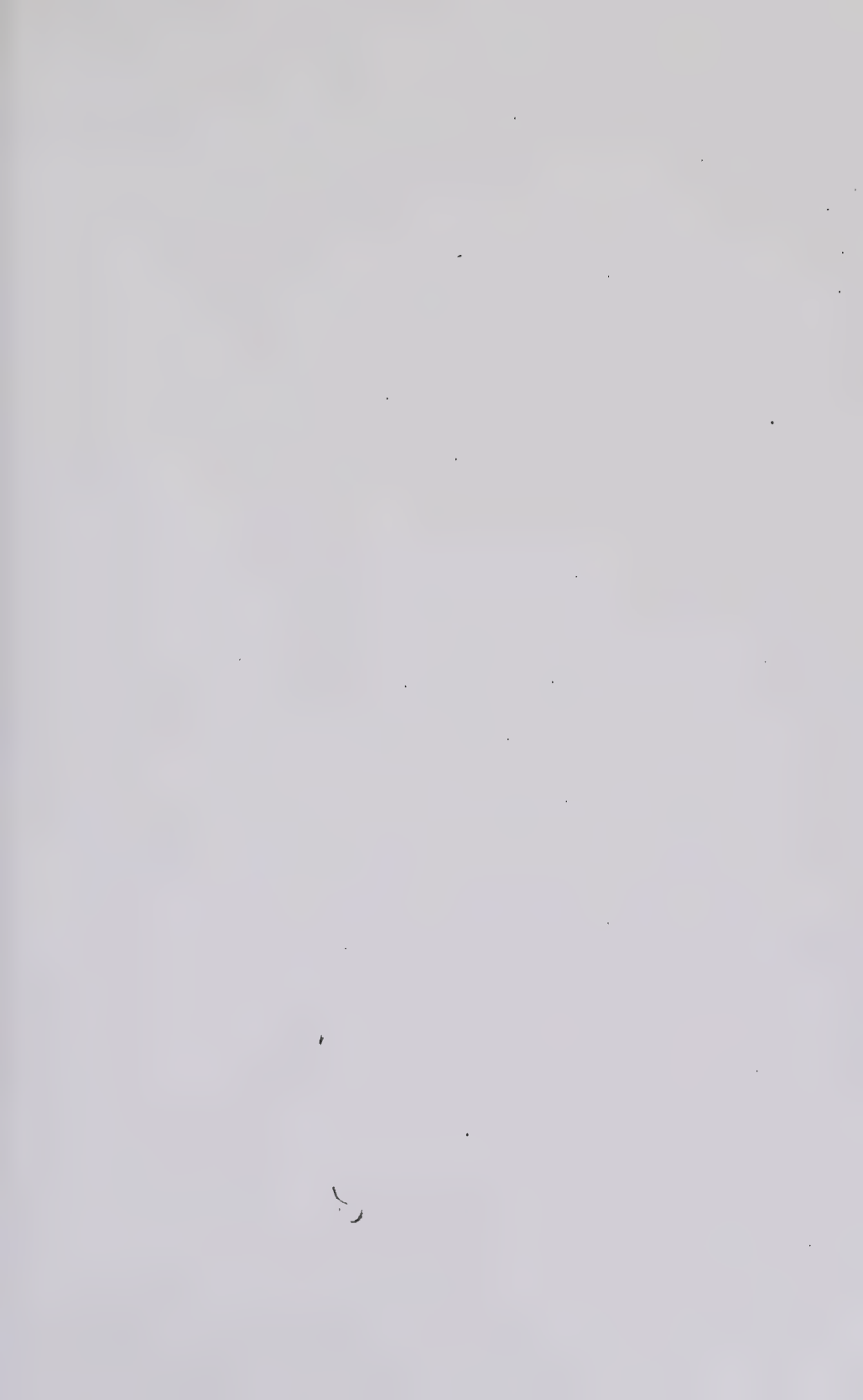
of Bareilly, until they were at length persuaded to transfer the poles to the shoulders of the legitimate bearers.

Now came the final good-bye ; and the giant's honest squeeze of her small hand made Georgie Vickers wince as he bade her farewell, while little Gwennie was kissed again and again by them all ; and when the palanquin started once more on its journey, there arose three such hearty cheers into the stillness of the night as melted its occupants to tears. Then the grunting chorus of the bearers gradually died away in the distance, and the light from the torch, like a mysterious Will-o'-the-wisp, danced and flitted along, growing fainter and fainter, until it finally disappeared into the darkness.

END OF VOL. I.













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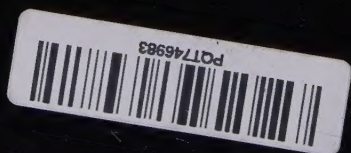




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